DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

RESEARCH REPORT No 92

THE NEW DEAL FOR LONE PARENTS:
LEARNING FROM THE PROTOTYPE AREAS

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Jane Millar, Jon Hales, Andrew Shaw & Wendy Roth

A report of research carried out by Social and Community Planning Research and Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy, University of Bath on behalf of the Department of Social Security
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all those people who took part in this study for their time and willingness to discuss their views and experiences in such detail. We are grateful to Dan Murphy, Julia Chilvers and Stephen Morris of the DSS Social Research Branch, for their guidance and advice throughout the study. We would also like to thank the SCPR survey interviewers and the other members of the research team at Social and Community Planning Research: Gillian Elam, Anthony McKernan, Wendy Duldig, Alper Hulusi, Sarah-Jane Lilley, Hilary Legard, and Virginia Swain.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AFDC</td>
<td>Aid to Families with Dependent Children</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>Benefits Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAPI</td>
<td>Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing</td>
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<td>CSA</td>
<td>Child Support Agency</td>
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<td>DSS</td>
<td>Department of Social Security</td>
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<td>ES</td>
<td>Employment Service</td>
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<td>Family Credit</td>
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<td>GAIN program</td>
<td>Greater Avenues for Independence program</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<td>ISCS</td>
<td>Income Support Computer System</td>
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<td>JET Scheme</td>
<td>Jobs, Education and Training Scheme</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker's Allowance</td>
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<td>NDLP</td>
<td>New Deal for Lone Parents (referred to as 'the programme' throughout this report)</td>
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<td>NINO</td>
<td>National Insurance Number</td>
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<td>SCPR</td>
<td>Social and Community Planning Research</td>
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<td>TEC</td>
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This evaluation of the initial phase of the New Deal for Lone Parents was commissioned by the Department of Social Security (DSS), and conducted by a consortium of independent researchers at Social & Community Planning Research (SCPR) and the Universities of Warwick and Bath. The main report of the evaluation will be published in Autumn 1999. This report, summarised in pages 1-11, presents preliminary findings, based on qualitative and quantitative interviews with lone parents, carried out from December 1997 to April 1998.

Harriet Harman, when Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, called the New Deal for Lone Parents 'a key part of the government's Welfare to Work strategy, which will give a 'hand up', not just a 'hand out'’. It is one aspect of a commitment to encouraging work among groups perceived as having some disadvantage in the labour market. The initial phase was launched in July and August 1997 in eight 'prototype' areas based on Benefits Agency (BA) districts. Four of these areas were managed by BA, while the other four were managed by the Employment Service (ES).

Eligible lone parents in receipt of Income Support are invited to participate in the programme if their youngest dependent child is aged five or more, while those whose youngest dependent child is below school age may 'opt in' by requesting an interview with an adviser. These two groups, each accounting for about half the population of lone parents obtaining Income Support, are referred to as the 'target' and 'non-target' groups.

Lone parents in the target group are usually sent a letter which invites them to attend an initial interview. At this interview the adviser will determine whether the lone parent is interested in looking for work or can be persuaded to do so, and will then develop a plan for improving labour market participation and optimising their income potential and self-sufficiency.

The overall goal is to promote movement from Income Support to paid work. Although the outcome for some lone parents may be to learn how to conduct a job search, or training to improve their skills, or simply increased awareness of in-work benefits, these are stepping stones to a job rather than outcomes themselves.

At this stage of the evaluation, the main aim was to examine the factors which influence participation and to consider the lessons about what is most effective. These were to inform the development of the national programme.
In the longer term, the evaluation is concerned with the ‘success’ of the programme, including a detailed assessment of its impact on employment rates and other outcomes. This will involve an estimate of the benefits of the programme in relation to the costs of implementation.

A range of data sources are being used to meet the objectives of the evaluation, including:

- local labour market information;
- qualitative data;
- surveys of participating and non-participating lone parents;
- administrative data;
- cost-benefit measures.

A crucial aspect of the evaluation design is the use of six other BA districts as a ‘control’ group of lone parents. The same range of information, with the exception of the cost-benefit measures, is being assembled for the control areas.

The background to the New Deal for Lone Parents is a gradual evolution of public policy towards catering specifically for the needs of lone parents. In the 1970s, when lone parents first became visible to policy as a distinct group, the consensus was that lone parents should not necessarily be encouraged to work, but should be able to choose between working and not working. By the late 1980s, this view was starting to change; lone parents were seen as often wanting to work, but were unable to do so for various reasons, including benefit ‘traps’ and the lack of childcare services.

The introduction of Family Credit in 1988 and its extension in 1992 to those working 16 hours per week were key policy changes. Lone parents could now more readily combine income from benefits and from part-time working. The number of lone parents receiving Family Credit has increased steadily. There have been a number of adjustments to the policy: the introduction of a childcare disregard in 1994 and raising its level in 1996; a bonus for those working 30 hours or more per week in 1995; and Maintenance Bonus payments as an incentive to move from part-time to full-time work in 1997.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a considerable body of research to address the issues of why some lone mothers work and others do not, and to identify what are the barriers which cause people to remain on income support and what are the bridges which help them to move off benefit into paid work. This research has confirmed the diversity of lone parents, and shows that there is no single policy approach which will promote more employment.

The New Deal for Lone Parents is part of a wider interest in active labour market policies based on the premise that each claimant needs a personalised ‘package’ of help and advice. The current evaluation provides a further
opportunity to explore whether, and how, individual advisers can help lone parents improve their incomes and achieve their aspirations to work, and to estimate the costs and benefits of such a policy.

The International Context

There has been a general increase in lone parenthood through western industrialised countries, although there have been important differences in the way each country has experienced and responded to this trend. Comparing the UK with similar economies, three main differences are:

- the relatively high incidence of lone parent families;
- the relatively high proportion of never-married lone mothers;
- the relatively low employment rate among lone mothers.

Research on the differences in employment rates between countries did not reveal any simple explanation, but concluded that a major factor is the availability of good quality, flexible and affordable childcare (though this alone will not automatically get lone parents into work). This highlights a key feature of the UK approach to encouraging employment, which has focused on fiscal measures rather than service provision.

A number of other countries have adopted measures to increase employment among lone parents, some with similar approaches to the New Deal. The JET programme in Australia was introduced in 1989, and among the many programmes in the US, one of the best known and most comprehensively evaluated is the Californian GAIN programme. A key lesson from both JET and GAIN for those implementing and evaluating such programmes is that 'success' should be conceptualised and measured in a variety of ways. Lone parents are so heterogeneous that a single goal may be inappropriate. There should be a range of goals, including improving basic literacy and numeracy skills, updating work-based skills, obtaining a qualification and developing effective job search methods, as well as seeking work immediately. Caseworkers and outcome measures need to take account of the diverse needs of lone parents. The experience of programmes such as JET and GAIN is that getting into paid work and off benefit is probably only going to be achieved for a minority of lone parents, but a range of other goals can be achieved more widely.

3. A Profile of the Lone Parents

This section documents the design of the samples. The quantitative data are from 998 interviews with a random cross-section of the lone parents in all eight prototype areas. The qualitative data are from in-depth interviews with 48 lone parents in prototype areas and 30 lone parents in control areas.

The profile of the lone parents' lives gathered through the survey and through the qualitative study reflects the diversity of characteristics and circumstances found in other studies of lone parents.
The survey sample could be described as adult rather than young parents, more than half being in their thirties and another quarter in their forties. As many as a quarter had long-standing health problems or disabilities and just as many had a child with similar problems. Seven out of ten were divorced, separated from a spouse or had ceased cohabiting with a partner, while a quarter were never-married.

One quarter of survey respondents said they had access to childcare when they first heard about the programme, mainly relying on relatives or friends. However, only three per cent had someone else who regularly looked after their children. Hardly any used registered childcare.

Overall, survey respondents had several years of work experience. Nearly half (45%) had previously been in work for eight years or more. Almost nine out of ten survey respondents said they had left school or sixth form college by age 16. Over two-fifths had no qualifications at all.

The majority of lone parents interviewed in the survey were still in receipt of Income Support at the time of the interview. In addition, more than seventy per cent had accumulated debts in the form of cash loans, outstanding credit card balances and other debts. Nevertheless, just over a third said they ‘get by alright’ financially and only a minority considered they were in serious financial difficulty.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide context to the situation within which the programme is located by demonstrating the most important and prevalent obstacles to work which it seeks to address.

Almost all the lone parents wanted to work at some time. The advantages of being in paid work over staying at home out of the labour market and on benefit, were noted and valued. As well as wishing to increase income, work was valued as a route out of isolation, to gain dignity and to achieve independence. The preference, for many, however, on re-entering the labour market, was for part time work, to fit in with other commitments, most notably those surrounding childcare.

The majority of lone parents interviewed in the survey were either in work, searching for work, or said they wanted to work at that time. For other lone parents, there remained a desire to work, but not yet. Most frequently in these cases (and particularly where there were younger children), there was a tension between the desire to work and their role as a parent to provide continuous care for their child. Occasionally this view was reinforced by feelings about the wish to ‘compensate’ for the child having only one parent; others stressed their child’s dependence on them for security. There were also several instances of parents whose children needed high levels of care, associated with chronic physical health problems, learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural problems. In
such situations, there might be long-term treatment or crisis situations, both requiring visits to doctors or hospitals.

For some, work was out of the question 'yet' because of the instability of their situation, such as the aftermath of a relationship having broken down. Health problems or the need to look after others in poor health also presented barriers to working at present. Some lone parents were involved in other commitments, such as an education or training course, including courses taken as a more practical step towards furthering their job aspirations. There were also small numbers who felt they had to await a key event, such as moving house or the birth of a child, before they could think about work.

There was some evidence that lone fathers had a particularly difficult time as a lone parent. They were often committed to full time parenting and either did not wish to cope with the additional requirements of work on top of their parental role or felt unable to do so. A few men felt that they had to be seen to give priority to their children to avoid a risk of their custody being challenged.

5. Barriers to labour market participation

Barriers to Work

Practical barriers to labour market participation varied in type and intensity for individual lone parents but two specific areas dominated: difficulties with childcare arrangements and financial concerns.

As well as the problems perceived in relation to leaving children, described in 4 above, lone parents experienced difficulty in finding childcare that they considered to be of high enough quality as well as affordable, reliable, convenient, or appropriate for their child's needs.

Financial concerns were very pervasive. There was financial risk involved and some lone parents perceived employment as not financially viable. Living on low incomes, there was security in the knowledge that benefit was reliable and guaranteed. If one started a job and it did not last, financial security could collapse. There was some doubt about the ability to reinstate benefits and wariness of the amount of effort and uncertainty that this may entail.

A second aspect of the financial uncertainty, perceived by lone parents, was whether income from work (with Family Credit) would be enough in view of the loss of passported benefits such as free school meals as well as expenses on clothing and travel to work. Those with mortgages could face the cost of arrears as well as the resumption of payments. Where

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1 Measures to alleviate these problems, such as Extended Payments of Housing Benefit, have not necessarily been experienced widely enough to counter reports of difficulties some people experienced. Similarly, the linking rule to preserve benefit entitlement for breaks of up to twelve weeks was not introduced until April 1998.
childcare was available, the earnings from work might be insufficient to cover its cost. Lone parents with particularly high outgoings such as a mortgage repayments saw these as insuperable barriers.

Many lone parents lacked qualifications and recent work experience, which they perceived to bar access to jobs and restrict earning potential. Those who had experienced long periods on benefit felt out of touch with workplace skills and also commonly lacked job references or were ignorant of job search methods.

Some encountered employer prejudice against taking on lone parents, and felt that local labour market conditions, lack of appropriate local job opportunities, or inflexible hours, militated against them.

A pervasive factor underlying the barriers to work, especially apparent in the qualitative interviews, was a lack of confidence.

Awareness of the programme was generally quite low until receipt of the initial letter inviting participation. On first hearing of the programme, lone parents’ impressions were mixed, though generally more positive than negative, regarding it as sympathetic to the situation of lone parents and a source of support. Those with negative impressions tended to be apprehensive because they saw the programme as compulsory; for example two-fifths of those who recalled receiving a letter felt that it was compulsory to attend an interview. This was often coupled with a fear that non-compliance would lead to a loss of benefit.

The survey found that as many as 78% of the targeted lone parents who had been sent a letter did not attend an initial interview and that non-participation was more likely among those who had larger numbers of children, a lower level of work experience, or were without regular access to childcare. In the qualitative study, non-participants often expressed a wish to remain at home to care for their children full time. In some cases, their own ill health or that of a family member prevented them from participating at the present time. The trauma resulting from the end of a previous relationship was also a factor associated with non-participation.

Attendance at an initial interview was more likely if the invitation specified an appointment with the adviser. Among respondents in the survey, one-fifth (22%) had attended an interview and almost half (45%) remembered the letter but did not attend the initial interview. One in three (33%) had no recollection of a letter, although administrative records showed that most of those people (at least 60%) had been sent one.

\[1\] This does not necessarily imply that lone parents went on to participate in the programme following the initial interview.
Types of participants

There were several variants among participants. Firstly, prompt participants included both those keen to participate and those who felt their benefit might be affected if they did not explain why they did not wish to participate. The others can be described as delayed participants, who only responded when sent a reminder letter or when telephoned by an adviser. This underscored the importance of additional input from the adviser.

The most common route into the programme was in response to a letter of invitation from an adviser. However, lone parents also came forward in advance of receiving an invitation to participate. In addition, the programme attracted lone parents from outside the target group (i.e. with children below school-going age) who opted to take part. These lone parents had already embarked on a search for employment; some had found a job and wanted confirmation that they would be better off financially or sought support in reaching the decision to accept it. Typically, they were referred by ES or BA staff to the New Deal office on making an application for a job or an enquiry about Family Credit. Such lone parents tended to present few barriers to the labour market and were strongly motivated to work.

Initial interviews

The initial interview seeks to gain a commitment to find a job. Most interviews took place at the local office, although others were conducted in the homes of lone parents. There was a wide range of interview lengths, with a modal duration of about 30 minutes. A few were less than 15 minutes and others over 2 hours in length.

The role of the adviser

During interviews in the qualitative study, lone parents’ own descriptions of their relationship with their adviser clearly delineated between an ‘effective’ and an ‘ineffective’ adviser.

There was no evidence that this distinction was area related, since both were found within the same area. As described by participants, the effectiveness of advisers depended on:

• their personal characteristics;
• how they did their job;
• how they related to the lone parent.

‘Effective’ advisers were described as friendly, outgoing, positive and enthusiastic, and at the same time participants remarked that such advisers’ relaxed and confident demeanour encouraged them to feel at ease during the interview – ‘effective’ advisers were understanding, interested and had time to listen. They were prepared to work with the lone parent on their motivation and confidence. In particular, they were non-judgmental and respectful.

By stark contrast, ‘ineffective’ advisers were rarely seen in such a light. Such advisers were repeatedly described as ‘inexperienced’, ‘unclear’ and
While these ‘ineffective’ advisers appeared capable of fulfilling the practical aspects of the role such as giving benefit information, completing better-off calculations or initiating a job search, they appeared to participants to do so with little enthusiasm or vigour. It was clear from accounts given during the qualitative interviews that such advisers were devoid of the motivational and confidence building skills that underscore the success of an ‘effective’ adviser.

This inconsistency in the delivery of the programme clearly had implications for the content of interviews, as well as the level and type of contact between the adviser and the lone parent following the initial interview.

However, even the attempts of ‘effective’ advisers to assist lone parents into work were often thwarted by the insuperable barriers to work which lone parents regularly faced. Nevertheless, in these circumstances, ‘effective’ advisers still managed to give the impression that they were doing everything possible for the lone parent. Such support was clearly valued.

Both ‘effective’ and ‘ineffective’ advisers covered basic topics such as personal details, benefit information, childcare arrangements and work or training opportunities. However, the ‘effective’ advisers covered these items in more depth and were also likely to spend time discussing ambitions, personal needs and circumstances. Those who met an ‘effective’ adviser were more likely to have left with a clear course of action.

Nearly all who had an initial interview reported having had a projection of their in-work income, usually referred to as a ‘better-off calculation’. This showed two-thirds of them that they would be better off in work.

The action pack file provoked a mixed response among those who were given a copy. The example of a better-off calculation and contact information were thought useful. Others felt it covered information they knew already, and was ‘an extravagance’.

There was a recurrent view that the voluntary basis of the programme was crucial, and that any move towards compulsory participation in future might ‘backfire’. It was sometimes suggested that, with exceptions for those in ill health or with very young children, it might be made compulsory to meet the adviser.

There was wide support for all lone parents to be included within the target population, rather than the age of the youngest child being used to distinguish target and non-target groups. Lone parents themselves identified advantages of contacting lone parents with younger children, such as keeping them in touch with the labour market and avoiding getting ‘stuck in a rut’.
Following contact with programme, lone parents can be situated along a continuum of distance from or nearness to employment, that is, from being on benefit and not looking for work, to being in work and no longer receiving benefit. This continuum is made up of five stages: ‘on hold’, ‘looking for work’, ‘in work on IS’, ‘in work on FC’ and ‘in work off benefit’.

The stages are by no means rigid and there is some indication of fluidity between them. Movement along the continuum (and back) is mainly attributable to three central factors - barriers to the labour market, the motivation to work and the effect of the programme.

‘On hold’

Those in the on hold stage were not ready for work and generally not looking for a job. The main reasons for this were:

- parental responsibility, a wish to provide continuous care for children;
- health problems;
- trauma associated with their separation or divorce or related events;
- commitments such as an education course.

While some of these people envisaged themselves taking advantage of the programme in future, this depended on a change in their circumstances.

Looking for work

The looking for work stage mainly included women with a wide range of ages, but who had in common the fact that they had previous work experience. They were motivated to work and many had attended a New Deal interview. Some had already started looking for work, while others had begun looking for work following an interview.

In work on IS

The category of those in work on IS was again quite diverse, though all of them in the qualitative sample were women. Among them were women who were already working part-time prior to the programme, while others had started more recently, but not necessarily as a result of contact with the programme. Some were looking for further work, while others limited their hours to earn the £15 per week allowed under the earnings disregard on IS. Views about increasing work were mixed, some not considering increased work until their children were older. Others considered there were difficulties about the transition from IS to FC, particularly the loss of housing benefit and other benefits associated with being on IS. Childcare was another concern, partly because hours of work were arranged around times when children were at school.

For some of those in work on IS, it appeared that the strength of their commitment to work was decisive in compensating for an ineffective adviser.

In work on FC

All of the qualitative sample members who were in work on Family Credit were women, and their work was in retail, services, clerical or personal care. The striking point about this group was a strong motivation
to work. Some had already identified a job prior to contact with the programme, while others attributed their employment to participation in the programme. Those who had experienced the transition reported favourably on the advisers' help in making it quick and straightforward. A few had delays in receipt of their first payment of Family Credit. On the whole, however, those in this category saw Family Credit as entirely different to being on IS.

There was very low take-up of the childcare disregard, partly because of the requirement for using registered childcare, which some lone parents did not trust. This meant that many in this category limited their work to the time their children were at school. As a result, their target was to work just enough to qualify for FC, and full-time work was not an option. One obstacle was the difficulty managing with the long school holidays. Access to informal child care provided by friends and relatives appeared to be a key to making the move into work on FC. However, maintaining a balance between work and time to be with their children seemed to be the aim of these lone parents.

There was only one example in the qualitative sample in this final category on the continuum, and she had already found work before contacting the programme and was looking for in-work benefit information.

The sample of lone parents in control areas tended to be located in the 'earlier' stages of the continuum. However, the primary focus for the control area qualitative sample was lone parents in receipt of Income Support. Thus, lone parents in receipt of Family Credit are not represented within it.

The barriers to labour market participation appeared more impenetrable among the lone parents in the control sample, often because of the apparent lack of help available. Awareness of the New Deal for Lone Parents was very limited, but, when described, the control sample respondents felt it would greatly aid their search for work. More striking than this were the numerous occasions on which respondents had mentioned spontaneously that they needed 'a helping hand into work'.

There was considerable diversity of opinion among participants about whether the programme had made a difference to their search for work. However, this was directly related to whether the lone parent had an 'effective' or 'ineffective' adviser.
Those who felt the programme had made a difference emphasised particular aspects such as:

- the financial help and reassurance given, notably in the explanation of in-work benefits and the better-off calculation, which influenced the decision to accept job offers; advisers also helped resolve problems in benefit receipt or maintenance arrangements;
- building their confidence and motivation to find work;
- the help given with job search skills or with finding work, such as help with filling in application forms, preparing a CV or ideas about where to look for vacancies;
- and in some cases, the ability of the programme to combat isolation, making lone parents feel that they had access to support, and the opportunity to discuss their hopes, fears and expectations.
An evaluation of the initial phase of the New Deal for Lone Parents was commissioned by the Department of Social Security (DSS), and is being conducted by a consortium of independent researchers at Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR) and the Universities of Warwick and Bath. This report presents preliminary findings from the evaluation, based primarily upon qualitative interviews with lone parents and supported by data from the first round of survey interviews\(^1\). These interviews were carried out in the period from December 1997 to April 1998. The main report of this evaluation will be published in the Autumn of 1999.

1.1 The New Deal for Lone Parents: Policy and Implementation

The main aim of the New Deal for Lone Parents is to assist lone parents in job seeking and to help them take up or increase paid work. At its inception, Harriet Harman, then Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, called this initiative ‘a key part of the government’s Welfare to Work strategy, which will give a ‘hand up’ not just a ‘hand out’’. As such, it is one aspect of a commitment to encouraging work among groups which are perceived as having some disadvantage in the labour market, including young people and the long-term unemployed. The main approach for achieving this goal among lone parents is the provision of advisers (or caseworkers) to provide a ‘tailored’ package of help and advice on jobs, benefits, training and childcare. Lone parents are invited to participate in the programme; this includes lone parents with school-aged children (i.e. aged five and above) who already receive Income Support and those who make a new claim for Income Support. Lone parents whose youngest child is below school age are also eligible for the programme and may ‘opt in’ by requesting to participate. These two groups, each accounting for about half the population of lone parents obtaining Income Support, are referred to as the ‘target’ and ‘non-target’ groups.

The initial phase of New Deal for Lone Parents was launched in July and August 1997, when the programme commenced in eight ‘prototype’ areas. The programme was implemented nationally in October 1998\(^2\). These areas (Cambridgeshire, Warwickshire, Cardiff and Vale, Sheffield East, North Cheshire, Worcestershire, Clyde Valley, and North Surrey), are intended to represent regions of low, medium, and high unemployment, and are based on Benefits Agency (BA) districts. Four

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\(^1\) Details of the other survey components of the evaluation are given in Appendix I.

\(^2\) The programme has been available nationally from April 1998 for lone parents making new or repeat claims for Income Support.
areas were managed and staffed by the BA and the other four by the Employment Service (ES). It was expected that a total of 33,400 lone parents would fall into the target group for the programme within these areas.

Lone parents in the target group are initially sent a letter inviting them to participate in the programme and to attend an advisory interview on a voluntary basis. The initial interview generally includes information about benefits and work opportunities, including a 'better-off' calculation, which assesses their potential incomes from employment compared with current income. With this information, lone parents work together with their adviser to develop a plan for improving labour market participation and optimising their income potential and self-sufficiency. Advisers are expected to be knowledgeable about job vacancies, and may act to facilitate the process of applying. They also function as links to other services, such as Jobclubs or Travel to Interview schemes. Advisers have access to limited funds to enable lone parents to arrange childcare during job interviews or short-term training courses.

While movement from Income Support to paid work is the overall goal of the New Deal for Lone Parents, the approach taken to achieve this aim is developed individually with each participant. Thus, while for some lone parents the desired outcomes may be to find a job or to increase the number of hours in work, for others beneficial outcomes may be to learn how to conduct a job search, or training to improve their skills and 'job readiness', or simply an increased awareness of in-work benefits. Once the adviser has assessed the individual's needs and what she may best gain from the programme, a personalised strategy is developed to move towards those goals. The participant is invited back for further advisory appointments, and may continue to rely on the adviser for in-work assistance after a job has been found. The continuity of an ongoing mentoring relationship and the information about benefits and work which the adviser provides is intended to enable lone parents to move toward reduced reliance on Income Support (IS).

1.2 The objectives of the evaluation

The objectives of the evaluation, identified at the outset, can be grouped under four closely inter-linked headings:

**Participation**
Reasons for deciding to participate or not. The nature of participation.

**Lessons**
What was thought to be helpful; in what ways can the process work more effectively; who found it beneficial and who did not.

**Resources**
What the take-up of the scheme has been and what effect it has had on demand for other services such as JobClubs, Training for Work, etc. Extrapolation of such projections to a national programme.
**Counterfactual**  How much the identifiable effect of the scheme represents events which would probably have happened in its absence; to what extent does the scheme lead to additional favourable outcomes, especially jobs.

In effect, there are both short and longer term objectives for this evaluation. In the short term, the main aim - and the key focus of this report - was to provide data to inform the introduction of the national programme. This involves examining the factors that influence *participation* in the programme and considering what *lessons* might be learned to improve effectiveness. Over the longer-term the main aim is to evaluate the ‘success’ of the programme⁴, taking account of its costs, assessing the impact on employment rates, as well as other possible outcomes, such as movements into education and training, changed attitudes to employment, more effective job search, and so on. This involves a fuller assessment of the counterfactual and measuring the costs of the *resources* that have gone into the programme in relation to net impacts⁴.

A variety of sources of data are needed to meet these objectives and five main sources are being used - local labour market analysis, qualitative data from in-depth interviews, administrative data, survey data, and cost benefit analyses. It is also important to have a ‘control’ group of people not within the New Deal for Lone Parents, so that we can try to isolate the impact of the scheme. Six control areas have therefore been chosen in order to act as comparators to the eight prototype areas⁵. Figure 1.1 summarises the overall research design and shows how the five sources of data relate to the main objectives of the evaluation.

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1. Throughout this report, the term ‘programme’ is used to denote ‘New Deal for Lone Parents’.
3. The six control areas are the BA districts Manchester Central, Glasgow Springburn and Cumbernauld, Blackburn, Leicestershire North, Wiltshire and Buckinghamshire.
### Figure 1.1 Summary of research design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Main sources of data</th>
<th>Supplementary sources of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation</strong></td>
<td>Qualitative data</td>
<td>Local labour market analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lessons</strong></td>
<td>Qualitative data</td>
<td>Local labour market analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources</strong></td>
<td>Administrative data</td>
<td>Local labour market analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cost benefit analyses</td>
<td>Survey data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counterfactual</strong></td>
<td>Administrative data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey data</td>
<td>Local labour market analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local labour market analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 1.3 The conduct of the research

The initial phase of fieldwork for this evaluation took place between December 1997 and April 1998. It comprised two methods of data collection - face to face survey interviews and in-depth qualitative interviews.

#### 1.3.1 The survey

Within this evaluation, SCPR are conducting surveys of lone parents in the eight prototype areas and the six control areas. This report includes preliminary findings from interviews with lone parents in the first part of the core random sample of lone parents in the prototype areas who were in receipt of Income Support and fell within the target population. When used in the report, survey data is clearly distinguished from qualitative data. Further details of other survey components of the evaluation are given in Appendix I.
1.3.2 The qualitative study

Two samples were selected for the qualitative study, one comprising lone parents within the eight prototype areas, the other lone parents from the six control areas. Both were purposively selected to ensure maximum diversity of lone parent characteristics. Findings from both qualitative samples are included in this report. The prototype area qualitative sample is sometimes referred to alone, as is the control area qualitative sample. However, both samples are sometimes combined, particularly when discussing lone parent characteristics. Where this occurs, it is clearly sign-posted.

In this report, qualitative research has been employed to describe the lone parents’ perspective of the programme from their own point of view. Qualitative research has made it possible to describe the range and nature of the perspectives that people hold and the factors that have influenced different outcomes. However, qualitative research samples are not designed to be statistically representative and this prohibits statements of incidence or prevalence. Survey data are drawn upon whenever possible to provide indications of prevalence.

Full details of the sample design, recruitment procedure, and fieldwork are contained in Appendix I and II.

1.4 Structure of this report

The remainder of this report is divided into seven chapters. The next chapter discusses the position of lone parents within public policy, while Chapter three profiles the lone parents interviewed in both the survey and the qualitative study. Chapters four and five are concerned mainly with lone parents and the labour market, specifically their work motivations and preferences, as well as the barriers to labour market participation. Chapter six deals solely with participation in the programme and focuses specifically on lone parents’ experience with their advisers. Chapter seven examines the impact of the programme in assisting lone parents into paid work and reflects on whether the programme has made a difference to the lives of lone parents in the prototype areas. The report ends with an overview of the lessons that can be learned from lone parents’ experience of the programme within the prototype areas.

Throughout the report, verbatim quotations and case studies are cited. Where necessary, small details have been changed to protect the anonymity of the contributors or their subjects. All names cited are fictitious.
To begin with, this chapter aims to contextualise the New Deal for Lone Parents within public policy initiatives of the last 10 years. It also explores the demography of lone parenthood within the UK and offers some comparisons with European and other English speaking countries. Finally, it considers lessons learned from American and Australian programmes which aim to increase employment levels among lone parents.

2.1 Lone Parents in the UK

Lone parent families are a very visible group in the UK. They are visible demographically, with the latest estimates showing that about 1.6 million families are headed by a lone parent with about 2.8 million children (Haskey, 1998), equivalent to about on in five of all children. They are visible politically, in the context of continuing debate over the causes and consequences of changes in family life and working patterns (Jones and Millar, 1996; Silva, 1996; Ford and Millar, 1998). They are visible fiscally, with high rates of receipt of state benefits and services leading to significant direct costs (the social security bill alone is now about £10 billion) and with other unquantified indirect costs also affecting government expenditure in areas such as health care services and personal social services.

It was in the early 1970s that lone parents first became visible to policy as a distinct group with, it was argued, needs in common with and different from those of couples. Many of the early studies concentrated on the difficulties that lone parents, especially lone mothers, faced in combining parenthood and paid employment (e.g. Marsden, 1969). The difficulties were seen as both practical (finding suitable jobs with flexible hours of work and adequate pay, childcare, etc.) and psychological or attitudinal (reconciling being at home to provide care for children with working to provide material support). The policy consensus then, and for some years following, was that even though employment usually improved material circumstances and alleviated poverty, lone parents should not necessarily be encouraged to work but should be able to ‘choose’ between working and not working. The benefits system would provide an income - not high but guaranteed - for lone parents who wished to stay at home and care for their children (Brown, 1988; Bradshaw, 1989; Millar, 1989).

This view was starting to change by the late 1980s. A number of factors contributed to this. Research indicated that lone parents themselves were often, they said, keen to work but were unable to do so for a variety of reasons (discussed further below). The costs of supporting lone parents on Income Support (IS) were rising rapidly and long-term receipt was increasing. Those who had jobs were much better-off financially than those who did not. Those who had no income other than IS were
often in difficult financial circumstances but government policy ruled out any significant increases in Income Support levels. More and more married women were going out to work and there was dwindling support for the view that mothers should be at home full time for the sake of their children, particularly older children. Lone parents in other countries often had higher employment rates than lone parents in the UK. Critics of government policy suggested that, far from being ‘neutral’ on the employment issue, current provisions were creating barriers to work, in the form of benefit ‘traps’ and lack of support for childcare services (e.g. Joshi, 1992; Brown, 1989).

The introduction of Family Credit (FC) in 1988 and its extension in 1992 to those working at least 16 hours per week were key policy changes. Rather than having an all-or-nothing choice between IS and full-time employment, lone parents could now more readily combine income from benefits and from part-time working6. Disregards of part of child maintenance payments and of part of childcare costs added to the financial incentives. A summary of these policy initiatives is shown in Figure 2.1. The number of lone parents in receipt of FC rose rapidly, especially after 1992, and by February 1998 there were about 355,000 lone mothers and 15,000 lone fathers receiving FC, at levels ranging from an average of £50 per week for one-child families to £97 for four-plus child families (DSS, 1998). Nevertheless, there remain many lone parents who are not in paid employment and who are, or seem to be in danger of becoming long-term Income Support recipients.

---

6 The choice before was not quite ‘all-or-nothing’ because of the small earnings disregard on Supplementary Benefit/Income Support and because low-paid full-time workers could claim some means-tested benefits. Nevertheless it was often experienced by lone parents in that way (Millar, 1989).
## Figure 2.1 Social Security Policy Initiatives Since 1988 Relevant To Lone-Parent Families

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Implementation of the Fowler social security review. Replacement of special needs payments with the Social Fund. Replacement of Supplementary Benefit with Income Support, loss of additional payment for extended spells of lone parenthood. Replacement of Family Income Supplement with Family Credit - subsidy for low-waged working families (couples and lone parents) where at least one partner works 24 hours or more each week and where income falls below a family-specific threshold. Payments normally made to the mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Maintenance disregard in Family Credit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Minimum number of hours work each week to claim Family Credit reduced to 16.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Introduction of the childcare disregard - up to £40 of income spent on formal childcare disregarded in the calculation of means-tested benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>A bonus is introduced in Family Credit for work of 30 hours or more each week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Childcare disregard increased to £60. Introduction of Back to Work Bonus payments on movement from part-time to full-time work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Introduction of Maintenance Bonus payments on movement into full-time work. Launch of New Deal for Lone Parents: individual caseworkers to aid transition to employment in eight prototype areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Lone parent premium in Income Support and One Parent Benefit abolished for new lone parents. Childcare disregard to be increased to £100 where two or more children are eligible (children up to age 12). New Deal' implemented nationally. Introduction of linking rule to preserve benefit entitlement for breaks of up to twelve weeks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the past eight or so years there has been a considerable body of research, much of it sponsored by the DSS, examining (1) why some lone mothers are employed and others are not, and (2) what are the barriers that keep lone parents on Income Support and the bridges that help them to move off benefit into paid work (see, in particular, Bradshaw and Millar, 1991; Ermisch, 1991; Marsh and McKay, 1993; McKay and Marsh, 1994; Ford et al, 1995; Ford, 1996; Bradshaw et al, 1996, Duncan and Edwards, 1996; Shaw et al, 1996). This research effort has thrown up some common findings - the importance of the age of youngest child is clear, as are 'human capital' assets in the form of education and work experience. State provisions play a role, but no one factor (replacement ratios, childcare provision, etc.) dominates for all lone parents. The message is that lone parents are very diverse - in their personal characteristics, their 'stage' of lone parenthood, their attitudes, the nature of their...
households, their social and neighbourhood networks, the labour markets they live in, their knowledge and understanding of their benefit entitlements, and their personal cost-benefit assessments of the risks and rewards of employment. In the face of such diversity there is no single policy measure that will achieve the goal of more employment/less reliance on Income Support.

The New Deal for Lone Parents represents a fresh way of approaching this goal. It is part of an increasing interest in, and commitment towards, 'active' labour market policies for all benefit claimants. These policies are based on the idea that each claimant is an individual with specific needs and assets. The best way to improve employment opportunities, therefore, is through 'tailor-made' packages that suit the specific needs of that individual at that particular time. Claimants are very likely to find it difficult to construct such packages themselves. Not only do they lack detailed knowledge of in-work benefits (as many studies show) but also, because there is no requirement for them to register for work, lone parents are especially likely to be unable to access Employment Service and Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) provision. The role of advisers includes providing information and support, encouraging claimants to become more active in their search for work, and monitoring claims. Advisers will thus act as conduits for advice, information and other services. Gardiner's (1997) review of the then existing welfare-to-work schemes found that although there was variation in the cost and effectiveness of such schemes, they 'did appear to have a significant impact on assisting people to move from benefits to paid employment' (pviii) and suggested that 'New Deal' policies could improve on existing schemes because the advice, services and support offered would be part of a more coherent framework. This evaluation of the initial phase of the New Deal for Lone Parents provides an opportunity to explore in detail whether, and how, individual advisers can help lone parents improve their incomes and achieve their aspirations to work, and to estimate the costs and benefits of such a policy.

The rise in lone parenthood is not just a UK phenomenon. Throughout western industrialised countries there has been a general increase in lone parenthood, part of a wider set of changes to family structures that include increased cohabitation outside marriage, more children born to unmarried parents, later marriage and later childbearing, more divorce, and more stepfamilies (Duncan and Edward, 1997; Lewis, 1997). These trends mean that there is much greater diversity in family forms and, looking over the life-course, individuals are likely to experience living in a range

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2.2 The International Context

With effect from 29 April 1998 lone parents could have immediate access to ES programmes. This was an easement which meant that lone parents no longer had to wait a qualifying period. It included access to Jobfinders grant; Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA); Jobclub; Jobplan; and Programme Centres.
of different families and households. Children in particular may find
their family circumstances change several times as they are growing up.

However, although there has been this general rise in lone parenthood,
there have also been important differences in the way each country has
experienced and responded to this trend. In the UK three features that
stand out are: the relatively high rate of lone parenthood; the relatively
high proportion of never-married lone mothers; and the relatively low
employment rates of lone mothers. These are summarised in Table 2.1,
which compares the UK both with our EU partners and with the other
English speaking countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA).
Bearing in mind that differences in definition and time-period mean that
these figures are not exactly comparable, the table shows that the UK has
one of the highest rates of lone parenthood in Europe, although it is not
so different from the rates found in the other English-speaking countries.

Divorce and separation is the most common route into lone parenthood
but there is a group of countries, including the UK, where never-married
mothers from a substantial proportion of the total. This at least in part
reflects the high levels of cohabitation in these countries, with many of
these 'never-married' women separating from a cohabiting relationship.
In the UK it is estimated that about half of the 'never-married' group are
former cohabitants (McKay and Rowlingson, 1998). Employment rates
vary from between one quarter and one third in Ireland and the
Netherlands to rates of 70 per cent plus in a number of countries. The
UK rate of 41 per cent is on the low side, and the UK also has a greater
proportion of married than lone mothers in employment. In addition,
rates of full-time working among lone mothers in the UK are particularly
low (not shown in the table) (Bradshaw, 1998).
Table 2.1 Summary Statistics on Lone Parenthood in Various Countries, early 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>% of families headed by a lone parent</th>
<th>% of all lone mothers who are never married</th>
<th>% of lone mothers in employment</th>
<th>% of married mothers in employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden (1990)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia (1994)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada (1990)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Na</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand (1994)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA (1991)</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>54-80*</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For EU Countries: lone parent with a child under 16 as a percentage of all families with a child under 16, 1994, except child under 15 for Austria and Finland (source: Bradshaw et al., 1996; Bradshaw, 1998) and 18 for Sweden (source: Bjornberg, 1997). Australia: lone parent with a child under 16 as a percentage of all families with a child under 16 (source: McHugh and Millo, 1997). Canada and New Zealand: lone parent with a child under 16 as a percentage of all families with a child under 16 (source: Baker, 1998). USA: lone parent with a child under 18 as a percentage of all families with a child under 18 (source: de Acosta, 1997).

The research by Bradshaw and his colleagues (Bradshaw et al., 1996; Bradshaw 1998) was unable to pinpoint any one single factor that would account for these differences in employment rates across countries. As with the research examining the determinants of employment in the UK, the cross-national research suggests that many different factors play a role and so:

"it is not possible to learn easy lessons from abroad ... it is unlikely that there are single or simple measures that can be employed by the UK".

(Bradshaw, 1998, p167)

As noted above, UK policy towards lone parenthood and employment shifted in the 1980s and early 1990s from a neutral to a more positive approach to employment. However the provisions intended to encourage employment focused almost entirely on fiscal measures and hardly at all on service provision. Manipulating financial incentives through the tax/benefit system was the main policy lever used and it is only in very recent policy measures that there has also been a focus on childcare services.
with, for example, the proposed increases in both childcare supply and in subsidies to help meet the costs of childcare. These measures are likely to be an important element in the context of the New Deal for Lone Parents.

Some other countries have also sought to increase employment levels among lone parents, using similar approaches to that of the New Deal for Lone Parents. Australia and the USA in particular have introduced various schemes which similarly adopt a caseworker or adviser approach in order to provide targeted help to individual lone parents. In Australia the JET Scheme (Jobs, Education and Training) was introduced in 1989 and became fully operational in 1991. The objectives of the JET scheme are to improve the financial circumstances of eligible customers and reduce program outlays by assisting with access to educational, vocational training and employment opportunities and, if required, childcare (DSS Australia Fact Sheet: the JET scheme). Participation is voluntary, with JET advisers located in DSS offices throughout the country. Those who wish to take part meet with a JET adviser in order to identify what barriers they are facing and what help might be available to overcome these. The help might take the form of referral to education and training schemes and/or childcare assistance. As Table 2.2 shows, just under 50,000 interviews were carried out in 1991/2 and about the same number in 1994/5 and 1995/6. By the later dates however more of those interviewed were being referred to the Employment Service, more were finding jobs, and more were taking up training. Help with childcare was available for almost all who requested it. Overall the estimated reductions in spending on Sole Parent Pensions rose from about A$20.7 million in 1991/2 to A$127.1 million in 1995/6. In total, it is estimated that JET participation has reduced spending on Sole Parent pensions by about A$342.5 million since the scheme started in 1989 (DSS Australia, 1997a).

It is important to note that, while JET is intended to ‘reduce benefit outlays’ this does not necessarily mean the aim is to get sole parents into work immediately and off benefit altogether. The focus on education and training recognises that many of those involved have few skills or labour market experience. Those who do find jobs do not, it seems, generally move off sole parent pension but rather they combine welfare and work, staying on sole parent pension but also working part time. As Table 2.2 shows, JET participants are more likely to have some income from earnings than Sole Parent Pensioners in general and typically earn higher amounts.

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* In Europe, these policies are often termed ‘activation’ policies and examples can be found in many countries (Lodemel et al., 1997). However lone parents are not usually the main targets of these policies with young people and long-term unemployed people more likely to be the priority groups.
Table 2.2 The Australian JET Scheme: 1991/2, 1994/5 and 1995/6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New interviews</td>
<td>46,823</td>
<td>47,962</td>
<td>50,970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interview target</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration with CES</td>
<td>19,860</td>
<td>34,738</td>
<td>33,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interview</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placed in employment</td>
<td>8,726</td>
<td>19,573</td>
<td>19,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interviews</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/training</td>
<td>8,552</td>
<td>14,081</td>
<td>13,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of interviews</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare places found</td>
<td>8,531</td>
<td>14,788</td>
<td>12,633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of demand</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jet % with earnings</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSP % with earnings</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jet average earnings</td>
<td>A$195</td>
<td>A$238</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSP average earnings</td>
<td>A$178</td>
<td>A$165</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DSS Australia, Annual Reports 1994/5 and 1995/6

An evaluation of the scheme (DSS Australia, 1997b) found that JET participants join the programme expecting to improve their employment prospects. One third of JET participants are in employment and about one-third are in training or education. Teenage mothers have the most difficulties in getting into employment while lone mothers with older children have the least difficulties. Many of the participants take up part-time, rather than full-time, work and this is viewed as a positive outcome, insofar as it allows lone parents to 'combine training, education or work with child raising until such time as they are able to take up full-time work' (p.X). It is also suggested that there has been some success in changing attitudes and towards employment, even if the jobs are not necessarily available to meet these aspirations (McHugh and Millar, 1997). Thus the impact of JET has partly been in getting sole mothers completely off Sole Parent Pension and into work, but also it has contributed to getting more lone mothers to view themselves as potential workers, to start training or looking for work, or to work part-time while receiving benefits - with a consequent improvement in their incomes.

The USA schemes have been many and various, making it difficult to provide a short summary. Splater-Roth et al (1995) point out that 'welfare mothers' (lone mothers receiving AFDC) are a particularly disadvantaged group in respect of employment, many (about two-fifths) being in work but not earning enough to lift their families out of poverty or benefit
Assessing the impact of welfare-to-work schemes has been difficult in the context of rapidly changing labour market conditions, and because programmes may be quite complex, it becomes impossible to isolate the effects of particular measures (Early and Thompson, 1997; Kaplan, 1997). The GAIN (Greater Avenues for Independence) Program in California is probably one of the best known and most comprehensively evaluated schemes, pre-dating the more radical changes to US welfare policy when AFDC was abolished in 1996. GAIN was evaluated using an experimental design, with sample members assigned to either the GAIN group or to a control group (Riccio et al, 1994). Over the three years of the schemes, those who participated had higher earnings than the control group, received less in benefit payments, and there was a small effect on the rate of exit from AFDC (the proportion in receipt being about 3 per cent lower than for the control group after three years). The scheme operated differently in different counties and it was the ‘Riverside’ scheme that appeared to have the greatest success, producing the largest earnings gains and welfare savings. The Riverside scheme focused on trying to get participants into employment of any kind and this approach has been criticised as potentially acting to drive wages down and thus increasing in-work poverty (Peck, 1996, quoted in Eardley and Thompson, 1997). Eardley and Thomson (1997, p48) summarise the effects of GAIN as:

‘GAIN is more effective overall than the programs of the previous decade, but not uniformly so. While the program increased the earnings of long-term beneficiaries, the effects were not consistent across counties. Client groups did not perform consistently well, leading evaluators to caution against prioritising certain groups over others, and suggesting that a broadly focused strategy may be more effective.’

The studies also indicated only a weak correlation between personalised attention, as measured in the surveys, and earnings impact across counties and across offices within counties. The relationship between personalised attention and welfare savings was found to be stronger, and statistically significant, at the office level. Perhaps surprisingly, however, this impact was negative, that is welfare savings were greater where personalised attention was lower. This suggests that savings may be achieved mainly through increased ‘throughput’ of clients.

One lesson from both JET and GAIN is that there are likely to be different routes to the goal of increasing employment. Because the target group, lone parents, are so heterogeneous they need different types of assistance to help them reach this goal. Appropriate ‘sub-goals’ might include improving basic skills of literacy and numeracy, updating work-based skills, obtaining a qualification and developing effective job search methods, as well as seeking work immediately. The caseworkers need to be sensitive to different needs, while outcome measures for the policy should take account of this diversity. Another lesson is that increased employment rates does not necessarily mean substantially reduced rates of benefit receipt.
Both JET and GAIN are (like the New Deal for Lone Parents) aimed at both these goals: getting participants into paid work and reducing benefit expenditure. But, although employment rates do increase, those with jobs do not necessarily move off benefits entirely. In fact, many continue to receive benefits while in work, so that benefit outlays are reduced but rates of receipt of benefit remain high.
This chapter locates the lone parents interviewed in terms of their personal characteristics and circumstances. It is based primarily on data from the survey, although qualitative data are included where appropriate.

The profile of lone parents’ lives gathered through the survey, and also through both qualitative studies, reflects the diversity of characteristics and circumstances found in other studies. Table 3.1 outlines the variety within both the qualitative and quantitative samples in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, household details and employment status. The differences between the distributions in these samples gives insight into how typical the qualitative samples are of the programme target population of lone parents, as identified by the survey. Broadly, both qualitative samples reflect the diversity of the target group. Technical details of the sample selection for both the quantitative and qualitative studies are given in Appendix 1.

The overwhelming majority of the respondents in the quantitative survey were female (91%). Male and female lone parents in the sample differed significantly. On the whole, lone fathers were older; half of them were aged 40 or over, compared with about thirty per cent of lone mothers. Consequently, the children of lone fathers also tended to be older. Over half of lone fathers had a youngest child of secondary school age (54%), while only a third of lone mothers (34%) had a youngest child this old. The men were much more likely to have married (or cohabited) than the women. Only 11 per cent of men versus 25 per cent of women had never been married.

To ensure coverage of issues relating to lone fatherhood, the number of lone fathers interviewed in the qualitative study was boosted beyond the proportions found in the population as a whole. Notable gender differences emerged in many aspects of the lone parents’ experiences which are explored in Chapter 4.

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See Bradshaw and Millar, 1991; Ermisch, 1993; Marsh and McKay, 1993; McKay and Marsh, 1994; Ford et al., 1995; Ford, 1996; Shaw et al., 1996; Bradshaw et al., 1996; Duncan and Edwards, 1996; Marsh et al., 1997; Payne and Range, 1998.

However, the primary focus for the control sample was those lone parents in receipt of Income Support. Thus, lone parents in receipt of Family Credit are not represented in the control area qualitative sample.
3.1.2 Ethnicity  Most of the survey respondents were white (92%), with a small proportion from Black (4%), Asian (2%), and Other (1%) ethnic groups. Small numbers of Asian and Black parents were interviewed in the qualitative samples.
Table 3.1 Profile of the samples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Survey N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Qualitative prototype N</th>
<th>Qualitative control N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20s or below</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>30s</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>40s</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>50s or above</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children in household</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 child</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>402</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 or more</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other children outside household</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>280</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of youngest child</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Older than 16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/Living with partner</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, not lived with partner</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of time on IS</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>less than 1 year</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 2 years</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 years or more</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tenure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Local authority tenant</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing association tenant</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private tenant</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortgage</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. living with parents)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment status at time of interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid employment</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- in work on Income Support</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- in work on Family Credit*</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time employment</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Qualifications</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Higher qualifications</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower qualifications</td>
<td>372</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>No qualifications</td>
<td>453</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left school or 6th form by age 16</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a technical qualification</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>1050</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† from marriage or cohabitation
* P/t employment - neither IS nor FC 12 (1%)
* Length of most recent IS claim

Weighted Bases 1045-1050

31
3.1.3 Age
Survey respondents ranged mainly between their twenties and fifties, but more than half were in their 30s, and another quarter were in their forties. The remainder were more likely to be younger rather than older - sixteen per cent were in their twenties and five per cent were in their fifties. However, the population overall comprised adult rather than young parents.

Qualitative respondents ranged from teenage to middle age, 19 to 53 years, though most were in their twenties, thirties, or forties. There was, however, a slightly larger group of younger lone parents in this sample than in the survey sample.

3.1.4 Health
As many as one-quarter (25%) of the survey respondents reported that they had a long-standing health problem or a disability. Of these, one-third said they had arthritic or rheumatic conditions, such as a back problem, that made it difficult to lift things or to stand for long periods at a time. Another third reported respiratory problems, such as asthma or bronchitis. One sixth of those respondents who reported having a long-standing illness, said they suffered from depression or bad nerves, while one in ten reported cardiovascular problems.

Three fifths (57%) of these respondents said their illnesses affected the hours or times they could work. Four out of five (81%) reporting long term illness or disability said that it affected the type of jobs they could do.

In the qualitative interviews, many respondents reported long periods of incessant illness, in particular conditions which could be said to be stress related, such as depression, agoraphobia or panic attacks. However, despite this, only one lone parent interviewed had qualified for receipt of a disability benefit. In some cases, the reported health problems were so severe that they represented the significant barrier to employment for the lone parent or at the very least curtailed the type of employment possible. This is discussed in more depth in Chapter 7.

3.1.5 Tenure
More than four-fifths of survey respondents occupied rented accommodation. Of these, the most common type were local authority tenants (56%), followed by housing association tenants (16%), and private tenants (10%). Fourteen per cent of the sample had a mortgage. Very few survey respondents (2%) owned their own home outright.

The qualitative samples reflected this distribution. The majority of these lone parents were tenants rather than owner occupiers. Most rented from local authorities, though housing association and private tenants

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11 One respondent was below age 20 and three were aged 60 or above.
were also represented. Those with mortgages highlighted the significant barrier that this presented to finding work and leaving IS. This is discussed further in Chapter 5. A few younger lone parents were living in their parents' home at the time of the interview or had done so, as a lone parent, for a period of time in the past.

3.2 Household Composition

3.2.1 Marital Status

At the time of interview, seven out of ten survey respondents (72%) were either divorced, separated from marriage, or had ceased cohabiting with a partner. A quarter of respondents (24%) were single. A small proportion (3%) defined themselves as married or cohabiting at the time. An even smaller proportion (2%) were widowed.

Similarly, most of the qualitative respondents were divorced or separated. Smaller numbers had never married or cohabited or had had little relationship with the father of their child; that is, they were 'always' a lone parent since the birth of their child (or the first child in cases of subsequent pregnancies). Very few of the lone parents interviewed in the qualitative samples were widowed.

3.2.2 Number of children

The number of children living with lone parents varied considerably, from one child up to a maximum of six children. Two-fifths of survey respondents (40%) had only one child in the household, almost another two-fifths (38%) had two children, and the remaining fifth had three or more children.

In general, the number of children reported by a respondent was linked to their marital status. Those who were single, who had never married or cohabited since becoming parents, were more likely to have only one child. Conversely, lone parents who had been married were more likely than average to have more children. Half reported having three children or more.

3.2.3 Age of children

Since the survey sample covered only targeted lone parents, there were no lone parents with children below school age within the sample. Two-thirds of respondents had a youngest child aged five to ten, and one-third had children aged 11 or above. The oldest child in the household was older than 10 in more than sixty per cent of cases, while around forty per cent only had children aged 10 or below.

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12 Both qualitative and quantitative data about respondents' marital status must be judged with caution. The in-depth interviews found that 'lone parents' neither use such an expression to describe themselves, nor often think of themselves in that way. There was uncertainty about what 'becoming a lone parent' referred to; the fact that a small proportion said they were married or cohabiting at that time - a situation which would preclude lone parenthood according to our definition - illustrates this uncertainty. In addition, some respondents may have classified themselves as single even though they had once been partnered, simply because they were currently without a partner.

13 A very small number (less than 1%) had children who had recently been born.
Since non-targeted lone parents, who came forward without receiving an invitation to participate, were included in the prototype area qualitative sample, a proportion of the lone parents interviewed had pre-school aged children (from 9 months old). In addition, a number of the lone parents interviewed in the control sample had babies aged from one year old upwards. In some cases, the lone parents interviewed had children who were themselves lone parents.

3.3.1 Informal Help and Support

Over a quarter of survey respondents (26%) reported having a child with a long-standing illness, disability, or infirmity. Among those who said that their children had an illness, fifty-two per cent said that one or more children had a respiratory condition, in particular asthma or bronchitis14. One in ten survey respondents (9%) had a child with a learning disability.

Furthermore, half of survey respondents (55%) who reported that their child had a long-standing illness said that this affected the hours or times that they were available to work because they had to be ‘on call’ in case their child became ill. Fifty-two percent said their children’s ill-health affected the types of jobs they felt they were able to do.

Children of lone parents in both qualitative samples also reported various health problems, particularly respiratory problems such as asthma. In addition, many lone parents reported that their child had a physical/learning disability or particular behavioural problems, such as hyperactivity.

The majority of survey respondents (57%) said that they had someone to turn to for all three types of support; only three per cent of respondents felt that they had no one to provide any of these forms of support. Overall, respondents were less likely to have someone from whom they could borrow money than to have someone whom they could rely upon for the other forms of support. Nevertheless, more than seventy per cent said they could borrow money from someone if they needed to.

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14 Though this is a large proportion, the incidence of respiratory illness among children in the quantitative sample is less than that reported among all children in England (11% compared with 14%) as estimated by the Health Survey for England (Prior, 1996).
The most common sources of social support were friends and family members. However, a small proportion of respondents felt they could turn to a current or former partner for help and support. Six per cent of survey respondents said they could rely on a current or recent partner for childcare but only three per cent felt they could depend on them for financial help or to discuss problems.

The qualitative data showed less consensus and suggested differing levels of social support. Where provided, support came from family and friends or from current partners. Previous partners sometimes provided financial support, but mainly in the form of clothing and footwear for the children, rather than direct cash payments.

3.3.2 Childcare
About one-quarter (23%) of survey respondents said they had access to childcare when they first heard about the programme. However, only three per cent had someone else who regularly looked after their children. This can largely be explained by the fact that few respondents were in work, and even fewer in full-time work at the time of interview. Out of this small number using childcare, most relied on family members or friends to look after their children. Hardly any survey respondents used registered childcare of the type allowed under the childcare disregard on Family Credit. This is discussed in more depth in Chapter 7.

3.4 Qualifications and work experience
3.4.1 Educational qualifications
Nearly nine out of ten (88%) lone parents interviewed in the survey had left school or sixth form college by age 16. While one fifth of the sample said they had completed some full-time further or higher education, two-thirds of them had left this by age 19. Forty-six per cent of all survey respondents claimed to have passed a school or college examination, however, only thirty-six per cent claimed to have a technical qualification.

Less than one-fifth (18%) of the sample were considered to have 'higher' qualifications, while another two-fifths (35%) had 'lower' qualifications. The remaining two-fifths (43%) had no qualifications at all. Several factors were found to be associated with educational attainment and the level at which qualifications were achieved including age, age of youngest child, length of work experience, length of time on IS, area, and health problems (relating either to one's own health or that of other household member).

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15 A minority of those in the qualitative samples did have a partner but they didn't live together, mainly because they judged that they were financially better off living apart.

16 About 5% of the sample said they didn't need childcare because their children were of an age where they could look after themselves.

17 'Higher' qualifications consist of A level or equivalent and above.
Lone fathers were more likely than lone mothers to have higher educational or vocational qualifications (28% versus 18%). However, they were also more likely to have no qualifications at all (53% versus 44%). On the other hand, lone mothers were more likely to have some qualifications, but these were typically at a low level (39% versus 18% of men).

Educational attainment among those in the qualitative samples was generally low, with the majority having no or few educational qualifications.

**Work experience** Overall, survey respondents usually had several years of work experience. Nearly half (45%) of the lone parents interviewed in the survey had previously been in work for 8 years or more. Thirteen per cent had some previous work experience but fewer than three years’ experience in total.

Perhaps in conjunction with their lower levels of work experience, lone mothers more frequently had longer spells on IS than the fathers – about one-quarter of lone mothers started their most recent IS claim in 1988 or earlier, while only one lone father in ten had started their claims so long ago.

On the basis of their current or most recent job, survey respondents occupied a diverse range of occupations. More than one-fifth had worked as childminders, general care workers, hairdressers, security guards or were employed in restaurants or pubs. Another fifth did routine unskilled work, such as cleaning, dish-washing or stocking shelves. Respondents also worked in the retail sector (13%), clerical and secretarial jobs (12%), operative and assembly work (12%), as well as craft and skilled service work (7%). Relatively few (4%) had worked in administrative, managerial or professional positions.

Nine per cent of the survey respondents had never had a paid job in their adult lives. More than seventy per cent of these lone parents had no educational or vocational qualifications compared with forty-three per cent of survey respondents overall. Only eleven per cent had ‘higher’ qualifications compared with 18 per cent overall. Those without educational or vocational qualifications were much more likely to live in areas of high unemployment—nearly 60 per cent of them did so, compared with thirty-five per cent of the entire sample. Those with no work experience tended to be younger than the sample as a whole, and were more likely to have a youngest child of primary school age (73% versus 63% of the entire sample). They were also more likely to have larger families; 32% had three or more children, compared with 20% of the whole sample. They were no more likely to have, or to have someone else in their household with an illness or disability.
About one in ten survey respondents claiming Income Support (10%) reported that they were currently involved in voluntary work. However, nearly one in five of those who had left Income Support by the time of the survey interview were involved in voluntary work before leaving (15%). While not a significant difference, this may illustrate the point that maintaining skills relevant to employment is one way back to the labour market.

The qualitative studies generally support this profile of work experience. On the whole, respondents' work experience was of unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Experience of skilled manual work was largely confined to male lone parents.

3.5 Income

A minority of survey respondents (12%) reported that overall they managed well or very well financially, while just over a third said they survive all right financially. A larger group (45%) admitted to having some financial difficulties or not managing very well, but only very few (8%) felt they were in deep financial trouble.

3.5.1 Benefit receipt

A large majority of respondents (88%) were in receipt of Income Support (IS) at the time of interview\(\text{15}\); on average, they received £68 per week. A small proportion (7%) were receiving Family Credit. For those receiving it, Family Credit brought in an average of £64 per week to the household income. The receipt of benefits other than these was quite low, as is shown in Table 3.2. The majority of respondents relied only on IS as their main source of income.

Table 3.2 Receipt of benefits in the quantitative sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Proportion receiving benefit</th>
<th>Average amount received per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income Support</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>£68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Credit</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>£64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Benefit</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>£46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Living Allowance</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>£40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid Care Allowance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>£42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Seekers' Allowance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>£71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed Mothers Allowance</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>£77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>£34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bases (weighted)</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>1050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[\text{15}\] All respondents in this survey sample should have been claiming IS at some point between May and October 1997. Those who were not receiving IS at the time of the interview had left IS since that time.
The qualitative samples corresponded with this picture of benefit receipt. Mainly, by definition, the lone parents were in receipt of Income Support and passported benefits.

### 3.5.2 Maintenance

The proportion of survey respondents whose former partner had in some way agreed to pay maintenance was quite low. Only twenty-two per cent of all respondents reported having such an agreement - fifteen per cent through the Child Support Agency (CSA) or a court order and seven per cent through a voluntary arrangement. Half (47%) of those with a CSA or court order always received payment. However, twenty-eight per cent said that they never received payment. The situation was slightly better when maintenance was organised through a voluntary arrangement. Three in five (62%) said they received a regular payment, while only seven per cent never received payment.

Formal maintenance arrangements usually generated a small amount of income. Thirty-six per cent of those receiving maintenance through an order said they received £20 or less per week. Fourteen per cent received more than £60 weekly. Voluntary payments were generally of a similar magnitude but were sometimes even smaller.

The qualitative interviews identified several disputed claims for maintenance, and revealed the fears and anxieties which surround the issue for lone parents. Lone parents felt threatened or worried by the unreliability of payments and were particularly concerned about the possibility of maintenance being reduced or ending altogether.

### 3.5.3 Other Income

A small minority (5%) of survey respondents received additional income from sources other than benefits, maintenance, or regular paid work. Generally, this ‘extra’ income came as informal assistance from family members, including children (for instance, contributions for lodging or housekeeping), or from casual work - such as cleaning, ironing, or childminding. The income received from such sources was generally modest, but significant for this group.

### 3.5.4 Debt

Given this picture of fairly low, and sometimes sporadic, income, it is not surprising that many of the respondents had accumulated debts. More than seventy per cent of the survey respondents reported that, at the time of the interview, they either had cash loans, outstanding credit card balances or other debts (including hire purchase arrangements). Three-fifths of these people reported that these debts were problematic, although only fifteen per cent said they were a big problem.

There was also a high incidence of debt among those in the qualitative samples. Difficulties related to the unpredictability of mortgage payments by ex-partners also played a role in the way some mortgage lone parents with mortgages incurred debt. This issue is explored further in Chapter 5.
Key findings in Chapter 3

- The profile of lone parents lives gathered through the survey, and also through both qualitative studies, reflects the diversity of characteristics and circumstances found in other studies.
- One quarter of survey respondents said they had access to childcare when they first heard about the programme. However, only three per cent had someone else who regularly looked after their children. Hardly any used registered childcare.
- Overall, survey respondents had several years of work experience. Nearly half (45%) had previously been in work for 8 years or more.
- Almost nine out of ten survey respondents said they had left school or sixth form college by age 16. Over two fifths had no qualifications at all.
- The majority of lone parents interviewed in the survey were still in receipt of Income Support at the time of the interview. In addition, more than seventy per cent had accumulated debts in the form of cash loans, outstanding credit card balances and other debts.
The diversity in lone parents’ motivations or preferences towards work, demonstrated in other research (Chapter 2), was also found in the current study. This was a further dimension which contributed to the general variety found among the lone parents as a group (seen also in the socio-demographic profile in Chapter 3). Underlying this diversity however there was a common theme: a strong wish to work was apparent across the interviews, even if current circumstances were deemed to be in the way. Chapter 4 therefore first describes this underlying motivation to work, and the various reasons behind it, before exploring the important influence of attitudinal issues affecting lone parents’ preferences or motivations against working at a particular time. Whilst it focuses on the more subjective factors, other barriers to working, which could be said to be more practical or external and which may exist whatever the motivation, will be explored in Chapter 5. Chapters 4 and 5 together therefore aim to provide context to the situation within which the New Deal for Lone Parents is located, by demonstrating the entire range of obstacles to work which the programme seeks to address.

4.1 The value of work

Whatever their current circumstances, the lone parents were strongly motivated towards paid employment at some time. The importance of paid work was described both in the survey and in the qualitative studies. It was apparent among those lone parents who were currently not working as well as those in work.

The way in which it was expressed, and the emphasis given, often linked to some of the difficulties experienced in living as a lone parent on benefit. These encompassed issues of: financial struggle; isolation; dependence; and the perceived stigma of lone parenthood. Work was valued as a way out of these difficulties, a route to:

- improved financial circumstances;
- overcoming isolation;
- gaining self respect, dignity, independence;
- avoiding dependence on the state;
- and (occasionally mentioned) to be a ‘better parent’.

Notably therefore, the motivation to work was not just financial: the other benefits were repeatedly emphasised and were interlinked. It was hard to tell from the qualitative data which came first. The order in which each is discussed below is informed by the survey (see Table 4.1 for example) which found the most common rationale to be financially related.
Table 4.1 Main reasons for wanting paid work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial benefit</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To make more money</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'For the children' (e.g. to buy them things)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To pay for something specific</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because I know benefits will be reduced</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve quality of life (general)/standard of living</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overcoming isolation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To get out of the house</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bored</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children are older/at school now (e.g. respondent has less to do/more time)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To meet people</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be in touch with the world/not so isolated</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avoiding dependence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To support myself and family, not be dependent on others/the state</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To set an example - as self-dependent - for children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self respect, dignity, independence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be more independent</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve self-esteem/self-worth/self-respect</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To better myself</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge/good for my brain</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To feel more useful</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To end depression</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To help people/give back to others</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job/career</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have a career</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoy working</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put skills/qualifications to use</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean responses per respondent</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base (weighted)</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: Survey respondents not currently in work who want to work now
Some respondents indicated more than one response
*less than 0.5%

4.1.1 The wish to improve financial circumstances

Financial struggle, material hardship, and the problems in general of living on a tight budget were described in the qualitative study. 'Lone-parenthood drags you down moneywise', was how one lone parent expressed this point, which others also mentioned in other ways. The incidence of debt or arrears has already been noted in Chapter 3. Some debt was inherited from previous relationships, generated by the ex-partner, or arose from problems with maintenance payments. Relatives provided help in some
cases, often help in kind rather than monetary help, such as assistance with decorating or donations of furniture, rather than cash.

'My mind's working all the time - how are we going to spend the rest of our life? How are we going to make ends meet?' (Female, 44, youngest child 15 years, prototype area)

Financial gain, both to improve standard of living and quality of life in general, was of course a key motivation to work. This was expressed in different ways. Many said simply that they wanted to make more money, to pay off debts, or gain the prospect of being able to save for the future, others to pay for something specific, notably for their children, or to get the fridge mended perhaps or have a holiday.

'Because you need that wee bit extra.' (Female, 44, youngest child 7 years, control area)

'Maybe be able to save ... and be able to take her [her child] on holiday, to be able to afford things that you couldn't do on benefits.' (Female, 25, youngest child 5 years, control area)

Rarely, however, was the motivation to work solely financial.

4.1.2 The wish to overcome isolation and boredom

In the qualitative study, very many lone parents cited feelings of being cooped up in the house, boredom, and the lack of adult conversation or company. Work was regarded as a way to counter this isolation, a means to get out amongst people, 'to be less fed up'. The opportunity that it provided of social contact, away from children's conversations, was recognised, and the chance to broaden horizons, gain stimulation and get more out of life. This was particularly pertinent when the children were older, away at school during the day.

'I want something for me. I don't want to be stuck at home. Don't want to think in 16 years' time 'What have you done with your life?'. Work gives you a sense of achievement, you're not sat at home bored with nothing to do apart from clean that cupboard out again for the fifth time this week. It's something more constructive. You want to be able to go out, meet people instead of sit at home. Get a bit of a life.' (Female, 25, youngest child 5 years, control area)

In the survey, nineteen per cent of those lone parents who currently wanted to work gave wanting to get out of the house as one of their main reasons. Respondents also wanted to meet new people (7%), find company (2%), or be more in touch with the world and less isolated at home.

4.1.3 The wish to gain self respect, dignity and independence

Low self esteem or lack of confidence was striking across the qualitative interviews, with a few exceptions. This is explored further as a barrier to employment in Chapter 5. In the current context, however, employment was seen as a way of improving self esteem. It was expressed in terms of work enabling me 'to stop feeling useless', 'to better myself'. Sometimes it was described simply in terms of 'something to do for myself' or a way 'to put
the emphasis on me myself for a change’ - gaining another identity, away from the children. It would also avoid their having to say they were just at home ‘not doing anything’. The motivation to gain independence through work was sometimes prompted by pressures from other people (relatives, friends, even from the children themselves) saying ‘get a life’, or questioning ‘why don’t you work like other Mums and Dads work?’

‘It’s dignity, it’s self respect, it’s a little bit of time at work when you’re you instead of somebody’s mother, somebody’s wife, somebody’s drudge… I’m fit and healthy, there’s no reason why I shouldn’t work.’ (Female, 42, youngest child 13 years, prototype area)

‘I would like to get a job and get outside now and do things for myself for a change.’ (Female, 38, youngest child 10 years, control area)

‘It’s something else to do for myself. I mean there’s not much point in sitting in the house when I could be doing something else… You still need a bit of yourself to get back to what you were before you had children.’ (Female, 37, youngest child 4 years, control area)

Lone parents expressed similar motivations in the survey; they wanted work in order to be more independent, to improve their self-esteem or sense of self-worth, to end their depression, or to feel more useful and put their skills and qualifications to use. Survey respondents also expressed the view that work could act as a form of self-improvement; as a challenge for them or that it would be ‘good for the brain’. Others simply desired to have a career or said they enjoyed working and that was motivation enough.

In the in-depth interviews, the stigma of being an unemployed single parent on benefit was strongly felt by some. This stigma was thought to be fed by media stereotypes, by other people’s attitudes, by employer attitudes, and also by the government in announcing proposed cuts to One Parent Benefit. The self respect provided by work was seen as a step away from this.

‘Classed as not working… ‘Another single parent on benefit’. ’ (Female, 24, youngest child 3 years, prototype area)

‘I’m sick of being logged with all lone parents…’ (Female, 43, youngest child 9 years, prototype area)

There was a strong dislike of being dependent on state benefit. Largely this related to feelings of a loss of pride or dignity, to finding it degrading to be on benefit. For some, notions of guilt and shame were engendered because they regarded the money received as ‘unearned’, or felt a ‘sponger’. This was also aggravated on occasion by self-blame (for example, the relationship ‘shouldn’t’ have broken down: ‘I should never have trusted him’ - then I wouldn’t be on benefit). For some, therefore, there was a sense of not wanting people to know, a stigma attached that one was on benefit and, in some cases that one was a lone parent. A few also mentioned
the added discomfort of the feeling of being watched (for example, with regard to boyfriends, in relation to benefit regulations). To work, therefore, was to be independent of the state, earning ‘your own’ money, and not being ‘beholden’.

Interestingly, these views applied specifically to Income Support and contrasted with feelings about being on Family Credit, which as an in-work benefit was more acceptable. This is discussed further in Chapter 7.

‘I’d rather be out to work knowing that I’m earning and paying for things… instead of having money off the government.’ (Male, 37, youngest child 12 years, prototype area)

‘I’d had enough of being nobody…just being a number somewhere, not a person who gets this that and the other given them for doing nothing… To get off the state…I’ve been on it for so long.’ (Female, 42, youngest child 5 years, prototype area)

‘I just feel as if I would like to go out and earn money for myself. You’re always having to take it off the government. I would like to go and do it myself…- your own money, instead of having someone to keep me all the time. It would be like getting money you’ve earned. I think you would appreciate it more because you’re actually working for it.’ (Female, 26, youngest child 7 years, control area)

‘I don’t enjoy being on Income Support, it’s not something I’ve ever looked forward to… I feel as if I’m not contributing anything. I’m not a part of everyday life. I mean I’m just a number somewhere and tucked away, and someone’s telling me this is all you need or all you deserve.’ (Female, 44, youngest child 15 years, prototype area)

4.1.5 The wish to be a ‘better parent’ for the child

The view was occasionally mentioned, though more often by those in work, that to be in work was a way to be a ‘better parent’ for the child. There were two aspects to this. One involved the wish to set an example to the child of someone making their own way in paid employment, as a ‘normal’ way of life. The other was the gain to the child of having a parent more fulfilled through work.

‘I’m happier in work, better with my child and others, less grumpy.’ (Female, 25, child 3 years, prototype area)

Far more common however was the view, described in Section 4.2 below, that children (especially young children) benefited more from having a parent at home.

4.2 The right time for work

The advantages of being in paid work over staying at home out of the labour market and on benefit, were therefore noted and valued by the lone parents. Paid work was usually something aspired to. For those in part time work, and for others who had worked in the past, it was likely to be enjoyed. Yet this general recognition of the value of work was
balanced in practice by ‘other factors allowing’. It was hedged in for many of the lone parents by ‘not now’ or ‘not yet’. Other more pressing concerns blocked the way so that the preference for some was tipped instead to not working at present. Such concerns could relate to beliefs and circumstances, often in combination. Key among them was the tension between work and family care - a choice instead to stay at home to perform more fully a parenting role. A further key factor related to the extent of stability in the household, the degree to which the parent felt sufficiently settled or was still in the throes or aftermath of separation or relationship breakdown. These are discussed in sections below.

There might be other specific circumstances in the lone parents’ lives which hindered them from currently taking up work. Personal ill health, or the need to care for someone else who was ill, was a key factor affecting as many as sixteen per cent of the survey respondents who were not currently looking for work; or, for smaller numbers, an up and coming event (such as a wedding, moving house, or the birth of a child). Rather than affecting ‘motivations’, these clearly led to the lone parent being ‘unavailable’ for work at present.

Occasionally, this preference not to work ‘yet’ developed from the preference not to do just ‘any’ job but to try to better oneself, for example through education, or training. This was sometimes seen as a stepping stone towards getting a better job or towards a specific longer term career. Courses undertaken covered IT, nursery nursing, cookery, and aromatherapy for example. The motivation here related in some cases to perceptions of how feasible it would be to get a job now, given current circumstances, and whether that job would provide the benefits of working (financial or otherwise). A few of the lone parents saw education or training as a constructive alternative way of spending time, given other insuperable barriers to employment.

If external barriers to work were considered insuperable then there was sometimes a perception that there was nothing to be motivated for, there was no choice. Some felt like this. But preferences not to work ‘yet’ were changeable; if the barriers shifted then it was likely that the motivation to work would be high and attempts to gain work would be made. The survey also showed that external barriers, such as a perception of there being no suitable jobs, generally did not dampen the motivation to work, just the process of looking for work.

For many, underlying these views or motivations ran a lack of confidence, where a reluctance or lack of motivation to seek work stemmed from a lack of belief in oneself or one’s capabilities. It could make the barriers to work seem more insuperable than they might be otherwise, given a little help. This is explored more in the next chapter.
The motivation or preference to work is therefore likely to relate to such factors as the age of the youngest child, childcare, and health, and this interpretation is upheld in the survey data. The survey data also highlighted a link with work experience and qualifications: those with the greater previous experience and those with higher qualifications were more likely to want to work immediately or in the nearer future, as were those who had been on Income Support for the shortest length of time.

One fifth (19%) of the lone parents in the survey were in part-time work at the time of the survey interview and a further three per cent were in full-time work. Of the rest, not currently in work, equal numbers were wanting to work 'now' (46%) or wanted to work at some point in the future (46%).

The survey also showed that forty-seven per cent of those currently or recently looking for work were looking for a part time job and thirty per cent sought either a part-time or a full-time job. This depended primarily on how much money the job paid and whether they would be better off than on IS, but also on how much time the job took up and whether it had longer-term prospects. Among those seeking part-time work, were relatively more who had younger children and more women. Twenty-three per cent of those looking for work were looking for full-time jobs (though proportionately higher numbers of parents with older children, lone fathers, and those who had mortgages). Part-time work was considered by these people not to be worthwhile financially particularly if they had a mortgage.

Table 4.2 describes changes in circumstances needed by survey respondents before wanting to start work16. It summarises the responses of those who said they wanted to work 'in the future'. Child-related reasons predominate - stated by more than 50 per cent of those preferring not to work yet (15% of the survey sample overall). This is followed by the circumstance of waiting to recover from an illness or to end caring responsibilities for another who is ill (16%, 5% of the survey sample overall), and by waiting for education or training to end (17%, 5% of the survey sample overall). Other specific reasons were stated by small numbers.

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16 Respondents were able to state the circumstances needed to start work as well as the time period when they thought they might start work, however, not all did so. Twenty-one per cent of respondents stated only the time period.
The tension between the motivation to work and the wish to provide continuous care for one's child was a key factor which on balance made many lone parents prefer not to work now, despite perhaps wanting to. A decision to 'put my work life on hold' was referred to by several of these lone parents. It was spoken of either in terms of duty or responsibility as a parent to be there for the child; or was related to the child's needs; or occasionally to straightforward preferences, to be there to see the children grow up. Strongly held views were engendered and this proved for some an emotive issue. There was a range in the extent to which it depended on the availability of good enough alternative childcare. For some there was a belief that no other childcare, outside the home, was acceptable. The choice therefore for these lone parents was to forego the benefits of work, even at personal and financial cost. Parenthood or parental responsibility was valued over being in work.
'With a childminder the child isn’t your own any more because the childminder does things differently. It’s not my opinions and way of life … but someone else’s. I want her to grow up with my ways and views about the right and wrong way of behaving.’ (Female, 22, youngest child 5 years, control area)

Generally, these views depended on the age of the child: the decision to work was often deferred until the youngest child was in school, or was deemed ‘old enough’ to look after him or herself. Therefore it was not surprising to find that some expressed strong feelings against any programmes that might pressurise parents of children under 5 into work (see Chapter 6). For some, the wish to remain at home for the child continued throughout child’s school career. The feeling that one’s child was ‘too young to leave’ extended to age 15 in a few cases if it was felt to be impossible to find a job restricted to school hours. Respondents were also mindful of the general problems of parenting teenagers or of dangers of leaving them alone and possibly vulnerable to being led astray if they themselves were away at work. In a few cases no other childcare, even if it bridged school and work, was acceptable even at this age

'I didn’t want [my son] to go to anyone else… he was too young to leave… he was mine and no one else’s. I just wanted him with me… He might end up calling the childminder Mummy.’ (Female, 39, youngest child 8 years, control area)

'When they were younger I was terrified to go to work, frightened in case they needed me. But now they’re fine.’ (Female, 38, youngest child 10 years, control area)

The above views may apply to all parents, including those in two-parent families, but seemed to be reinforced by lone parenthood. A few described a wish for example to ‘compensate’ the child for the lack of the other parent, by spending more time with them. It was also argued that lone parents needed ‘to put more effort in’ as a parent, acting as two parents in one – ‘because she’s on her own with me.’ Some said that, if married and living with a partner, they would soon have returned to work.

'Because I’m on my own I felt they needed me since they didn’t have their Dad with them. I need to put more effort in.’ (Female, 37, youngest child 8 years, prototype area)

This view was applicable where the parent perceived the children to be emotionally affected by the family break-up, though was not necessarily restricted to such households.

'The children are just starting to feel stable again [after the separation] and rely on me, this makes it harder to go out and work. It’s difficult just being me.’ (Female, 39, youngest child 8 years, control area)

'Quite frankly if I walked out on my daughter now and said I’m going to work, the result with my daughter would be catastrophic.’ (Male, 44, youngest child 5 years, prototype area)
The decision to remain at home also related to particular needs of the child. These were sometimes a result of behavioural problems, trouble with the police or truancy from school, or learning difficulties. Some children were simply described as ‘clingy’.

In the quantitative survey, respondents mentioned particular problems working because their children had disabilities or health problems (7%), behavioural problems (6%), or learning disabilities (4%), and they felt they needed to be with their children rather than working. The demands, say, of unpredictable hospital visits, and the need generally to attend to the child, represented a practical rather than motivational barrier to work.

Other child-related concerns that affected the decision not to seek work ‘yet’ related to the ‘unaccustomed’ nature of their caring role. Notably this was mentioned by lone fathers, but also, in general, it was seen in the context of difficulties in dealing, as a parent alone, with children (whether or not the children were in some way ‘difficult’). For these people, the parenting role was demanding enough, it precluded the ability to cope with work too.

An added component for a small number of lone fathers was the fear of otherwise losing custody of the child. Additional to the wish to be at home, they felt a need to be there as an indicator of being a ‘good parent’.

Some of the above views were likely to link to lack of confidence and this was stated as such by a few. There was a notable lack of confidence in general among the lone parents in the qualitative interviews (Chapter 6). But for some, the wish, for example, to remain at home with a secondary school age child may be a way of rationalising a lack of confidence to go out to work. There was recognition that parents in general lose confidence when out of the labour market for some time, and they described how the realisation that their children were growing older and becoming more independent crept up gradually, perhaps all the more so for lone parents: ‘We’ve only got each other. I think we’ve clung a bit to each other over the years.’ (Female, 36, youngest child 15 years, prototype area)

4.2.2 Coping with difficulties associated with the past relationship

Some lone parents emphasised that problems from the past relationship influenced their readiness or motivation to work now. These might be the effects of a fairly recent situation, experienced as traumatic, or could be ongoing, lingering from a relationship that ended some time ago. The effects were, overall, varied and wide-reaching. They could impact, for example, on the lone parents’ physical and emotional health, including confidence. They could include financial problems, such as debt, arrears, uncertainty over mortgage or maintenance payments. They could also have an effect on housing issues: for some, the breakdown of the relationship had gone hand in hand with moving home, perhaps in traumatic conditions, or in stages, for example from the original home,
to parents, to other temporary accommodation such as a hostel, to the
current home. There could also be continuing problems of dealing with
a violent or alcoholic ex-partner; or issues around fears of losing custody
of the children.

Some of these specific effects, including the effects on the children and
the need to cope with emotionally disturbed children, are discussed in
more detail elsewhere in this report (Sections 4.2.1 and 5.2). Overall
however the outcome for these lone parents was that at this stage in their
life they were just not able to work. There were implications here for
the potential impact of programmes such as the New Deal for Lone Parents
unless more intensive help could be provided.

Of course, not all lone parents were traumatised by their relationships,
nor had they necessarily experienced problems in the past. There was a
range across the interviews from acute difficulties, to others in a period of
adjustment to lone parenthood, or still others where, by contrast, the
lone parent was now happier to be living alone and finding this to be a
more stable existence. Some perceived themselves to be better off as a
lone parent, whether financially or otherwise.

4.2.3 Lone fathers and the
motivation to work

Evidence from the qualitative studies suggested that, compared with the
lone mothers, the lone fathers fared worse as a single parent. These were
lone fathers on IS and are therefore not representative of lone fathers as a
whole. Many were struggling. They perceived their role as harder than
that of lone mothers, being - as they put it - less accustomed, as men, to
dealing so directly with household and parenting matters. This often
combined with negative feelings about being out of the labour market,
greater pressure (societal expectations) that they, the traditional
breadwinners, 'should' be in paid employment. Yet they were very
committed to the welfare of their children and to staying at home to care
for them. The combination of work and parenting would in their view
jeopardise this care and none of the lone fathers in the qualitative study
were in paid employment. Plans to seek work were generally on hold.

There appeared also to be a greater incidence of behavioural problems or
emotional difficulties among children in these households which, in some
cases, were extreme. The children in several cases were also separated
from siblings living elsewhere with their mother. Some of the lone fathers
had the added fear of losing custody of a child if they went out to work,
or perceived that they faced an added potential threat from the CSA.

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30 As provided, for example, in some voluntary sector innovative schemes - see K.
Woodfield and H. Finch (1999), New Deal for Lone Parents: Evaluation of Innovative
Schemes, DSS Research Report No. 89.
The added burden of ill health affected several of the lone fathers (one for example had recently suffered a heart attack). The survey data, however, showed that lone fathers' health was not generally worse than that of lone mothers. Overall, the lone fathers in the qualitative studies had an older age profile (aged from 36 to 53) than that of the lone mothers and this is reflected in the survey data (see also Chapter 3). In the survey they were also less likely to be in work at the time of the interview (13% compared with 23% of lone mothers).

4.3 Implications for the New Deal for Lone Parents

Lone parents' underlying motivation to work, described in this chapter, suggests that a programme such as the New Deal for Lone Parents would be predisposed to succeed. Those lone parents who are ready for work, in the sense that they want to work now, are likely to be especially susceptible to the help it can offer. However, there will be other lone parents who will not yet be ready to consider work and who are therefore not yet ready for the New Deal. This group will include those who:

- feel that their duty, responsibility or preference is to be a full time parent, based either on a general conviction, or related to added difficulties in coping:
  - as a one- rather than two-parent family; and/or
  - with a child who has special problems, such as emotional or behavioural problems, or health problems;
- are still contending with the effects of a difficult relationship with, or break-up from, an ex-partner (whether emotional, financial, or issues around housing).
Key findings in Chapter 4

- There was an underlying preference among the lone parents for employment rather than staying at home out of the labour market and on benefit.

- The key reasons for this were: to improve financial circumstances; to overcome isolation and boredom; to gain dignity, self respect and independence; and to avoid dependence on the state.

- For many, however, the first preference on re-entering the labour market was part time work. And many did not want to work 'yet', deciding instead to focus on their role as a parent; or, still coping with the aftermath of a relationship having broken down, or with illness, or other commitments or a specific event.

- Many factors are therefore likely to influence lone parents' job readiness at a particular time, including: the age of the youngest child, number of children, childcare arrangements, relationship with the father of the child and length of time since separated, and the health of the child.

- A programme such as the New Deal for Lone Parents would be likely to be welcomed among those lone parents already wanting to work, but others will not yet be ready to consider work and therefore not yet ready for the New Deal.
5 BARRIERS TO LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION

The previous chapter has already shown motivations, preferences and circumstances that may curtail the will to work. This chapter now builds on that picture by highlighting the barriers to employment. Its emphasis is on those barriers which might be said to be more practical or external, in the sense that they exist regardless of individual motivation. In combination, these barriers can foster low confidence, which is in itself a powerful obstacle to the labour market. This is therefore also discussed, at the end of the chapter.

Figure 5.1 lists barriers to work for lone parents, as described by those interviewed in both the survey and the qualitative study. Each is explored individually in the remainder of the chapter though, more accurately, the barriers to work are layered, they are all interlinked.

For example, a common view was that work would not be financially viable. This was based on a perceived low earning potential, given low level qualifications and limited work experience. It was also informed by the need to take into account childcare costs, and a possible high level of outgoings that would need to be paid out of any earnings.

While most lone parents described barriers to labour market participation, the types of barriers and the intensity with which they are experienced, varied considerably. However, in essence, they revolved around two specific areas, concerning finance and childcare.

Figure 5.1 Barriers to work: overview

- Childcare arrangements
  Problems in finding affordable childcare that is also high quality, reliable, convenient, and appropriate for the child's needs.
- Financial concerns
  Concern about the viability of work: wage potential vis-a-vis outgoings.
  Concern about financial risk in:
  - transition period from benefits to paid work;
  - transition back onto benefit if things go wrong;
  - unaccustomed budgeting;
  - start-up costs of self employment.
- Lack of skills, formal qualifications, or (recent) work experience.
- Job opportunities and employer attitudes:
  - lack of job opportunities appropriate for lone parents
  - e.g. inflexible/inappropriate working conditions;
  - employer prejudice against lone parents;
  - locality of work; travel/transport problems.
The prevalence of these barriers among survey respondents is shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Factors which made it difficult to work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Childcare</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with finding or arranging childcare</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills/experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My lack of qualifications</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My lack of work experience</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transport</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport costs</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of transport</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labour Market</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No job opportunities locally</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The attitudes of employers towards lone parents</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No appropriate clothes for job interviews</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debts</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean response per respondent 2.2
Base (weighted) 1050

Base: All respondents
Some respondents indicated more than one response

* Respondents were shown a card listing the nine potential barriers included in this table

5.2 Childcare problems as a barrier to employment

For many lone parents, the practical difficulties of finding or arranging suitable childcare were a major deterrent to seeking work, or even to considering it as a feasible possibility. This was the most commonly mentioned barrier. Although, as discussed in Chapter 4, some parents had made a decision not to work yet so that they could be a full-time parent, for others the use of childcare facilities was ruled out due to practical difficulties.

More than half (55%) of all survey respondents reported that 'problems with finding or arranging childcare' made it difficult to work. The proportion was far higher where a child had a long term illness (62%), or where the youngest child was of primary school age (69%, compared with 30% of those whose child was aged 11+).

Childcare problems made full-time work particularly difficult. Thus, many lone parents opted for part-time work to coincide with their children's...
school hours as a way of minimising the need to use childcare facilities. Of those survey respondents who were not in full-time work when they were interviewed, half (49%) said that they found it difficult to work full time because their children needed them around; half (51%) also said they needed to be flexible with the hours they worked. The qualitative study underlined the need for flexibility to cater for child and family responsibilities, a requirement which precluded many from taking a full-time job.

Overall, there were practical problems in finding childcare that was:

* affordable:  
  Childcare costs in relation to earnings were often the key problem, in order to make work worthwhile. Seventy-one per cent of survey respondents who found childcare a problem specified this as its cost. For some households, the need to arrange childcare for more than one child compounded the difficulty of paying for it.

* available:  
  A general lack of childcare facilities or of after-school clubs was perceived. This was mentioned by half of survey respondents finding childcare a problem.

* convenient:  
  The need for childcare facilities to be available at appropriate times, including hours beyond the school day and in school holidays, and in close enough proximity for convenient access, was a further aspect. ‘Inconvenience’ was an issue for thirty-seven per cent of survey respondents finding childcare a problem.

* reliable:  
  Doubts were also expressed over the reliability of childcare facilities, both from the point of view of their being sufficiently dependable for the parent to hold down a job, and also, for offering the child stability and routine. Reliability was specified by forty-seven per cent of survey respondents finding childcare a problem.

* high enough quality:  
  In general, a wariness about the standard of treatment and care provided in childcare facilities was expressed in the qualitative study. Parents wanted reassurance that they could feel confident of their child’s care (some mentioned television documentaries describing ill-treatment of children in nursery care as influencing their views here).

* appropriate for the child’s needs:  
  In relation, for example, to special needs or behaviour problems.

Changes in childcare provision that are planned through the National Childcare Strategy may improve the experiences of lone parents in seeking childcare in future. However, it is worth recognising that having such concerns over childcare was not always a barrier to working. Even those survey respondents who had left IS by the time they were interviewed mentioned concerns about childcare such as finding someone to look
Financial concerns were a central barrier to employment for the majority of the lone parents. They related to the viability of work and the risk involved in moving from benefit to work - 'It's not feasible' being a recurrent theme. For many lone parents, the option of work was precluded by the likelihood of a low earning potential combined with the need to pay for childcare and the loss of passported benefits (unless on FC, a benefit about which there was some ignorance among those who were not currently working). In cases where there were high outgoings, such as mortgage payments, high rent or debt, there were especial problems.

In the survey, many of those who had left IS by the time of their interview expressed worries about the financial viability of doing so (see Table 5.3). Simply having enough money to live on was the most common worry expressed by this group (46% of those who had left IS). Many had concerns about being able to pay for specific bills or expenses, such as paying rent, Council Tax, or having to repay debts, loans or overdue bills right away. There was some concern of being 'worse off' in work than on benefit.

It is worth noting that these and other worries about moving from benefits to work were not always insurmountable barriers to working. The very fact that these IS leavers admitted having these worries, yet still left IS, shows that some people do overcome the obstacles. It may be that those who did leave did not perceive these concerns in the same manner as those who did not.

Interestingly, financial concerns could be offset by motivation, as for example in the case of a lone parent with mortgage arrears who, nevertheless, decided to go into full time work after her youngest child started school ('I thought the time was right, that I'd had enough of being a nobody, a number somewhere, not a person...'). She had a fatalistic view, although the mortgage arrears were still mounting:

'It's gone on so long it doesn't worry me any more.' (Female, 42, youngest child 5, prototype area)

For others, there remained fears of the financial risk involved in leaving IS: concern about not having enough money to live on, of loss of financial stability, and of perhaps getting into debt (or further into debt). These anxieties were sometimes informed by personal experience. Some had left IS and started work but had not managed financially. Others had
heard of these difficult experiences which increased their own insecurity about leaving benefit.

Taking up work and leaving IS involved a certain amount of risk for lone parents. Not only was there the overall risk of ending up worse off or unable to cope financially without benefits, but the actual process of leaving benefits was one which was surrounded with insecurity and uncertainty - of knowing how much money would be coming in, and of being able to plan out finances on a day to day basis when respondents were unsure how long it would take for new benefits, paycheques, and other sources of income to arrive.

There was also concern about the transition back onto benefit if it all went wrong. Some uncertainty was apparent about whether or not it was permissible to go back onto benefit if things failed to work out.

This concern especially applied to full-time work and there was a recurrent view that full time work was not financially viable.

Table 5.2 Financial Worries Before Leaving Income Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Viability</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having enough money to live on</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enough money to pay my rent</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enough money to pay my Council tax</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having less money than I got on IS</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to pay for things I got for free on IS (e.g. prescriptions)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to pay back any debts, loans or overdue bills straight away</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having enough money to pay my mortgage</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Risk</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting through the first few weeks without IS</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing how long it would take to receive new benefits I claimed</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing exactly how much money I would have coming in each week</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing when or whether Family Credit would arrive</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not knowing which other benefits I might be able to claim</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to claim IS again</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The job I went to would not last very long</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mean responses per respondent 4.2
Base (weighted) 131

*Respondents were shown cards listing these and other potential worries.

5.3.2 Unaccustomed budgeting

Some lone parents were apprehensive about the unaccustomed budgeting involved in managing money from a salary or wage, for rent, council tax and other items, some of which would otherwise have been paid by
benefit. They were uncertain whether or not they would manage to support themselves in this way.

Survey respondents who had left IS expressed these fears. Many were concerned about getting through the first few weeks without Income Support (36% of those who left IS). Concern about eligibility for in-work benefits was also expressed. There was some anxiety about the gap between the last payment of IS and the first payment of FC - particularly the uncertainty of when the first payment of FC would arrive. This is discussed further in Chapter 7. In addition there was concern about how to find out what other benefits they would be eligible for.

5.3.3 Problems for mortgagees

Concern about inability to pay the mortgage (and potential mortgage arrears) was a key barrier to work in five out of the eight NDLP mortgagee cases in the qualitative study in the prototype areas and in the six cases in the control area. Unless it was possible to earn a wage high enough to be able to afford the mortgage repayments, these lone parents felt stuck (unless, exceptionally, they a fatalistic view about possibility of losing the property, as in the case described in 5.3.1).

'If I were in a Housing Association house... I'd be working now because I could get help towards my housing but I'm not so I'm going to be stuck.'

(Female, 30, youngest son 6, prototype area)

5.3.4 Other costs of finding work

Job search costs were occasionally mentioned in the qualitative study. Twelve per cent of all survey respondents mentioned lack of appropriate work clothes as something making it difficult to work.

5.4 Skills, qualifications and experience as a barrier to employment

Low qualifications, along with limited and perhaps outdated work experience and workplace skills (highlighted in Chapter 3), barred access to jobs and restricted earning potential for many of the lone parents. Noting the requirements specified in job advertisements, such as those seen in the Jobcentre or in local newspapers, they felt disadvantaged in the labour market when competing with others.

The various aspects, described as obstacles, covered:

- **skills:**
  Lack of skills or training, whether in general or for a particular line of work. Others felt their skills to be out-of-date, having been away from the world of work for so long. Computer skills were the most mentioned in this context.

- **formal qualifications:**
  Lack of any formal qualifications or of qualifications at a high enough level (or, in the case of a graduate, perceived as 'too high'). Over a third (37%) of all survey respondents mentioned lack of qualifications as a factor making it difficult to work.
• **work experience:**

The problem was more likely to be an absence of recent work experience, with a long gap away from the job market as a full time parent, and, limited work experience, for example for a short period or in one line of work only. A third (30%) of the survey respondents said their lack of work experience made working difficult.

• **job reference:**

A further aspect of the absence of recent work experience included the lack of job references which were noted by the lone parents to be needed for several job applications.

• **age:**

A feeling of being 'too old' though aged in the twenties (as well as older), or occasionally 'too young', was also sometimes expressed as an obstacle to finding work or to considering the possibility of training. This was a further factor making them feel liable to rejection from potential employers. Partly it was a reflection of lack of confidence (described in 5.6).

5.5 Job opportunities and employer attitudes as a barrier to employment

Some of the lone parents did not know whether suitable job opportunities existed. Others, having looked around, perceived a lack of job opportunities, and in particular a lack of the right type of job opportunities for them, to match not only their qualifications or age (as described in 5.4 above), but importantly, their needs as a lone parent. Overall the survey showed that nineteen per cent of all survey respondents mentioned a lack of job opportunities which made it difficult for them to work (although 26% of those currently looking for work mentioned this).

5.5.1 Lack of job opportunities appropriate for lone parents

The perceived lack of job opportunities appropriate for lone parents of school age children covered not just the type of jobs that offered high enough pay to cover childcare and other costs (5.3.1 above) but also extended to the type of jobs offering child-friendly work practices. There was a perception that practices in the workplace were unaccommodating or unsympathetic to mothers of school age children in general and particularly to those who were lone parents. Problematic and inflexible working hours (not coinciding with school hours, nor offering flexibility to change) were particularly mentioned, as well as lack of childcare provision.

'There don't seem many jobs advertised for during school hours - everything is nine to five… Where are the jobs from nine to three?' (Female, 28, youngest child 5, control area)

There was thought to be a lack of employers who could offer flexibility and understanding or a more positive attitude regarding the implications of lone parenthood.

5.5.2 Employer prejudice against taking on lone parents

In the qualitative study, a view was expressed that employer attitudes as well as employer practices (5.5.1) presented a problem to be overcome in
getting work. Employers were seen by these respondents to discriminate against lone parents when recruiting staff, seeing them as ‘unreliable’, due to the difficulties of balancing parenthood and work, especially with younger children. Potential problems with childcare arrangements fed the ‘unreliable’ label, including the need to cope if a child should fall sick, and the juggling of additional childcare arrangements during school holidays. As some of the lone parents pointed out, this also applied to two-parent families who had young children. Yet it was reinforced, some felt, by prejudice against lone parents, a more widely-held stigma. Hence, a decision had been made by some not to reveal their lone parent status in interviews because ‘it might go against me’.

‘Employers would choose someone lacking qualifications but without commitments rather than me with skills [secretarial/typing/reception] but children.’ (Female, 36, youngest child 1 year, prototype area)

‘Employers might think ‘I’m a young mother, I’m on my own, I’m not really going to make it’.’ (Female, 24, child 3 years, control area)

Evidence of such negative employer attitudes was given by some of the lone parents in describing the type of questions that they had been asked in job interviews, enquiring for example into childcare arrangements in different circumstances. Further evidence for some came from personal experience of employer practices when they had worked in the past.

The survey showed that a total of eighteen per cent of all the survey respondents (21% of those currently looking for work) mentioned the unsympathetic attitudes of employers as a factor which made it difficult for them to work.

As the survey underlined, not all lone parents held these views. Yet overall, thirty-seven per cent of survey respondents felt that employers did not give lone parents a fair chance. A quarter of the survey respondents (23%) felt they did have a fair chance and forty per cent had a neutral view, presumably because they had not been involved in the labour market recently and had no experience of employers’ attitudes.

### 5.5.3 Locality of work: travel or transport problems

A perception that suitable jobs were to be found only outside the local area was noted in the qualitative study. This was particularly felt to be a barrier to finding employment if the jobs were too far away in relation to the availability and/or cost of public transport, or if the timing of the public transport service did not fit in well with times for dropping off or picking up children at school or at childcare facilities. If the travel time to and from childcare was lengthy, the extra cost of childcare needed to be taken into account. Overall, nineteen per cent of all the survey respondents mentioned transport costs and eleven per cent specified availability of transport as factors making it difficult to work.
Also, a few of the lone parents were nervous about travelling far away from home. Due to a general lack of confidence or to other difficulties, they found it daunting to travel long distances.

These problems led to a tendency to only consider work nearby. Half an hour’s travel time was the maximum that most of the survey respondents would be willing to travel for a one-way trip.

There was reluctance too to move house to another area for a job (unless it seemed particularly attractive and secure) as this would necessitate moving children from their schools and communities. Therefore jobs were often restricted to the home town or to the particular locality within it.

5.6 Lack of self-confidence or self-esteem as a barrier to employment

Chapter 4 has already mentioned the lack of confidence and low self-esteem notable among many of the lone parents interviewed in the qualitative study, though with some exceptions, and ranging in its severity. This was emphasised directly by some or was illustrated in recurring phrases such as ‘I know I couldn’t do it anyway’ or ‘The thought of having to go out to a job with a lot of other people’ or ‘You feel frightened: are you capable of doing the job?’ It was also illustrated by limited job horizons or ambitions that were described, and by a recurrent self-perception of being ‘too old’ (at any age, it seemed) such as ‘too old’ to try a new type of work or training, or even to apply for a job. It was commonly felt that ‘Jobs require younger people.’

One-fifth of the survey respondents expressed the view that, on the whole, they were not a confident person. Another fifteen per cent felt neither confident nor unconfident. Forty-one per cent said that at times, they feel useless, and over one in ten (13%) felt they could not do things as well as most other people.

One-fifth (21%) of survey respondents said it was difficult for them to go into full-time work because their ‘confidence about working is low’ (this excludes the 3% of the sample in full-time work).

This lack of confidence might be applicable to anyone who has been out of the job market. For example, the above could echo the feelings of women from two-parent families returning to work or long term unemployed people of either gender. But lack of confidence was exacerbated by lone parenthood, as many pointed out. For example, as they stressed, the isolation was likely to be greater, and relationship breakdown in itself was often accompanied by loss of confidence or self-esteem.

‘Mums don’t have confidence - haven’t worked for a long time. You’re just in your own world with your child, the world’s moved on and you’re almost pushed in a box, put the lid on and forgotten about.’ (Female, 32, youngest child 6 years, prototype area)
'Going back to work means being thrown back into the big wide world and it's quite a shock to your system.' (Male, 53, youngest child 16 years, prototype area)

As a barrier to employment, lack of confidence seemed very significant and an issue that a programme such as the New Deal for Lone Parents would need to address. Chapter 4 has demonstrated its effect on the motivation to work. However, it also hindered people from actively looking or applying for jobs, even though they would like to, or affected the type of jobs they sought (restricted to safer or 'dead-end jobs' only). It was seen also in lone parents' ignorance or lack of experience concerning job search methods. It also prevented consideration of other options such as training.

Lack of confidence threaded through many of the other issues which in themselves served as barriers to employment, as shown in Figure 5.4. It resulted from the barriers and then reinforced them.
Figure 5.4 Factors in the situation of non-working lone parents on benefit that can relate to low confidence/low self-esteem/low morale

For some, trauma associated with relationship breakdown and its effect, e.g. on morale

Isolated
- 'Cooped up'
- Alone with child(ren)
- Limited adult company

Health problems
(parent or child)

Low income
Material hardship

Financial struggle
and for some,
- debt
- financial uncertainty
(e.g. maintenance payments)

Dependence on the State
- 'Issues of pride'/
'guilt'/shame
- Stigma
- Feeling watched

Housing stress
(e.g. arrears, fear of repossession)

Difficulties in parenting role
- 'two parents in one',
- behaviour problems or illness of child

Low level qualifications

Lack of out of date job skills

Lack of job references

For some: rejection in the job market

Perceptions of employer attitudes prejudiced against lone parents:
- Lack of workplace childcare provision

Employment opportunities
- incompatible with children
'No suitable jobs'

Perceptions of social attitudes prejudiced against lone parents:
- media stereotypes
- general attitudes and government policy:
- cuts in One Parent Premium
- lack of childcare provision

LOW CONFIDENCE

65
Key findings in Chapter 5

- Practical barriers to labour market participation varied in type and intensity for individual lone parents but two areas dominated, concerning difficulties with childcare arrangements and financial concerns.

- Childcare difficulties were experienced in finding provision that was affordable, of high quality, reliable, convenient, and appropriate for the individual child’s needs.

- Financial concerns were expressed in relation to the viability of earning enough from paid employment; the financial risk involved in the transition period from benefits to a wage (and back onto benefit if necessary); and unaccustomed budgeting on a wage. Lone parents with particularly high outgoings, such as a mortgage, saw this as an insuperable barrier.

- Further barriers for some included a lack of skills or formal qualifications, and of recent work experience, which were perceived to bar access to jobs and to restrict earning potential. Local job opportunities appropriate for lone parents of school age children, were thought to be limited. Rigid working conditions, inflexible hours, and negative attitudes of employers towards employing lone parents were further potential problems.

- Lack of confidence and low self esteem was notable among the lone parents and acknowledged as a barrier to seeking work. Some pointed out that this was exacerbated by lone parenthood and was reinforced by the numerous other barriers that stood in the way of paid employment.
This chapter is primarily concerned with routes to and reasons for participation\textsuperscript{21} in the New Deal for Lone Parents. In addition, it will examine lone parents’ experience of and views about the programme, focusing particularly on their interviews with advisers. The chapter draws primarily on data from the qualitative component of the evaluation, though survey data have been added where appropriate to give an impression of the prevalence of views and behaviour.

6.1 Getting involved in the New Deal for Lone Parents

6.1.1 First impressions of the programme

In the prototype area qualitative sample, awareness of the programme was generally quite low until receipt of the initial letter inviting attendance at the initial interview. This is underscored by a negligible awareness of the programme amongst those interviewed in the qualitative control sample. In addition, a substantial minority of survey respondents (27\%) had not heard of the programme when first asked. However, when shown a copy of the letters of invitation by the interviewer, one third of these respondents remembered something about it.

Lone parents in the prototype area qualitative sample, who had heard of the programme in advance of the letter, generally did so on TV, through local or national print media, or from other lone parents who had some experience of the programme. Lone parents acknowledged that word of mouth reports were influenced, both positively and negatively, by individual experiences of the programme. However, among those interviewed, there was a preference for making one’s own judgement rather than relying on the opinion of other lone parents.

Lone parents also reported learning of the programme through local marketing, such as poster advertisements or leaflets, as well as through specially organised information events in the local community.\textsuperscript{22}

Wherever they were gained, first impressions of the programme were somewhat mixed. Figure 6.1 demonstrates the variety of this opinion. Overall, lone parents’ initial impression was generally more positive than negative. Those who viewed the programme in a positive light tended to focus on its helpful nature, in particular the offer of help into work and

\textsuperscript{21} Note that during the preliminary phase of the evaluation (and in this report) ‘participation’ is defined as taking part in an initial interview; it does not necessarily imply subsequent activity on the programme (which will be explored in full in the final evaluation report).

\textsuperscript{22} A national advertising campaign was launched in October 1998 to coincide with the national roll-out of the programme.
the concomitant assistance with benefits and childcare. The invitation to come along to an initial interview was viewed by lone parents as an opportunity to discuss one's own situation and gave the impression that someone was genuinely interested in listening to them. Such encouragement to 'come and chat' was generally viewed as one of the more friendly aspects of the programme.

Much of the initial negativity about the programme stemmed from a belief that participation was in some way compulsory. There was sometimes a view that the government was 'clamping down' on lone parents, often fuelled by the then recent announcement of the planned abolition of One Parent Premium for new claimants Income Support (IS) from April 1998.

Figure 6.1 First impressions of the programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Just what I need to get me back to work</td>
<td>- I didn't see what it could offer me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will give me more money and help back to work</td>
<td>- What do they want now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- An offer of help to find work</td>
<td>- I've done it all before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Some help with childcare</td>
<td>- If I don't go there will be problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I want to take part – I want to work</td>
<td>- Pressure to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gave me the impression that someone was interested in me</td>
<td>- They'll give me a job I don't want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Friendly – come and chat</td>
<td>- Will be forced to go out to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interested to see what they could do</td>
<td>- If I don't take part they will stop my benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Useful way of getting help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Will give me the opportunity to talk</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- It's voluntary – no pressure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I've got nothing to lose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Any help is better than no help</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the whole, those having negative first impressions were more likely to believe that the programme was in some way compulsory. While advisers explained to lone parents at the initial interview that participation was voluntary, leaflets and letters describing the programme did not. Thus, it is entirely feasible that lone parents could have an expectation of compulsion prior to the initial interview. Consequently, even those with a positive impression of the programme were sometimes inclined to regard the programme as compulsory. Among those survey respondents who received an initial letter, more than two-fifths (42%) thought that attendance at an interview was required. Participants were nearly twice
as likely as non-participants to think that attendance at the interview was required. The voluntary nature of the programme is discussed further in Section 6.3 below.

Of principal concern to those whose first impressions were more negative was the fear that failure to participate would incur some loss of benefit. Those who viewed the programme in this light mentioned being ‘panicked’, ‘alarmed’ or ‘frightened to death’ at the prospect of being ‘forced to work’ to retain their benefit payment. There was sometimes a lack of clarity about what the exact implications of non-participation would be, though there was widespread belief that it could result in benefit sanctions. In addition, lone fathers interviewed in the prototype area qualitative sample, who often had a history of involvement in Restart courses, Job Clubs, or other programmes offered by the ES, generally felt that they had already undergone a lot of what was on offer through the programme, and thus were less inclined to view it in a positive light.

6.1.2 Inviting participation

Several versions of the initial letter were available for use by advisers to encourage lone parents to participate in the programme. Broadly, two styles of approach were adopted. One was an open invitation to lone parents to make contact with the adviser to discuss participation. The other gave a pre-arranged appointment time for an interview with an adviser. Examples of programme approach letters are shown in Appendix III.

Non participation

The majority of lone parents surveyed did not take up the invitation to participate in the programme. The survey found that as many as 78% of the targeted population of lone parents did not attend the initial interview, and only two-thirds of targeted lone parents remembered receiving the letter. However, as shown in Figure 6.2, a substantial minority (32%) reported that they had never received a letter.

Figure 6.2 Attendance at initial interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All survey respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Didn't recall receiving letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received letter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended initial interview?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 The remaining 2% were 'early starters', who asked to participate before receiving a letter.
Linking survey data with the Lone Parent Adviser database\textsuperscript{24} suggests that letters had been sent to at least 60\% of those who reported not receiving a letter. Although all those in the survey should have received a letter of invitation, the dispatch of a letter is no guarantee of its receipt. It is possible that letters may have been delivered to the wrong addresses. In addition, a minority of those in the prototype area qualitative sample reported receiving letters from ‘the Social’ and throwing them straight in the bin, which may explain why some do not recall the content.

Survey respondents were more likely to participate if they received a letter that specified an appointment time. More than two-fifths (45\%) of those who attended an initial interview reported that their letter specified a time, compared with only 10\% of non-participants. Even accounting for the fact that many non-participants didn’t remember seeing the letter, this difference is of considerable importance. However, among those interviewed in the prototype area qualitative sample, there was sometimes a view that receipt of a letter with a designated appointment time was tantamount to ‘being summoned’ and, thus, implied some element of compulsion in the programme. Therefore, while letters that specified an appointment time clearly led to increased attendance at the initial interview, there was some danger that lone parents may have incorrectly interpreted them to mean that participation in the programme was compulsory.\textsuperscript{25}

Lone parents interviewed in the prototype area qualitative sample who declined to participate in the programme generally expressed a preference to remain at home so they could provide continuous full-time care for their children. In addition, ill health or trauma associated with the end of a previous relationship was also said to prevent participation in the programme at the time the invitation was received. The role of these issues in relation to motivation to work has already been discussed in some detail in Chapter 4.

Data from the survey offers some further insight into factors related to participation:

- **The number of children in the household** had some effect on participation. Parents with 3 or more children were less likely to participate than parents with one child (19\% compared with 25\%).

\textsuperscript{24} The Lone Parent Adviser (LPA) database is a case management system maintained by advisers. Key events are recorded for each lone parent which enables advisers to track the progress of lone parents within the programme.

\textsuperscript{25} As a result of this finding, appointment times are not specified for lone parents in the national programme.
• The rate of participation also depended on the level of work experience reported. The participation rate was highest (27%) among those with eight or more years of work experience. This decreased to 22% among those with three to eight years experience, while among parents with less than three years experience, the participation rate was 17%.

• Respondents who already had access to regular child care at the time they heard about the programme were more likely to participate. Nearly half (48%) of all participants had access to regular childcare or did not need childcare when they heard about the programme. By contrast, only 34% of non-participants had access to childcare or did not need childcare when they first heard of the programme. In general, this was informal childcare, usually supplied by family and friends.

Prompt participation Having received a letter of invitation, lone parents wishing to learn more about the programme either telephoned or called at the office to see an adviser. This usually happened within about two weeks. A prompt response can be linked to both positive and negative first impressions of the programme. Those viewing the programme in a positive light were often quite enthusiastic about getting involved and, consequently, made contact with the adviser soon after receiving the initial letter. Conversely, those who voiced negative first impressions often contacted the office immediately upon receipt of the initial letter because they feared that their benefit would be affected if they did not. There was some belief that letters from government agencies had to be ‘obeyed’ and that failure to do so promptly could lead to a cut in benefit.

Those who had received the open invitation to participate generally made first contact with the adviser by telephone, either to make an appointment for an initial interview or to explain their reasons for not participating. Lone parents interviewed without a phone reported that they had called in to the local office in person to arrange their initial interview. However, there was little evidence that those not participating in the programme would call into the office to explain this.

Delayed participation Follow up letters and, where possible, phone calls to lone parents who did not respond to the initial invitation to participate in the programme, sometimes resulted in an agreement to participate in the programme. The reasons for such ‘delayed participation’, given in the qualitative interviews, provide further insight into the factors affecting take-up of the initial invitation to participate. The fact that the initial invitation arrived while children were at home on school holidays, and in need of continuous care, was mentioned by some as being a key reason for not attending an interview at the outset. In addition, there was sometimes a view that the follow-up letter had a less compulsory tone than the initial invitation and that this in itself prompted them to reconsider. A copy of a ‘reminder letter’ is shown in Appendix III. Where ‘delayed participation’ resulted from telephone follow-up, respondents sometimes
remarked that it was the extra clarification provided by the adviser that had encouraged their participation.

The survey found that following receipt of the initial letter, the next contact was adviser-led in 17% of cases. Following this contact, about a third of these lone parents ended up participating in the programme. While not all those who were re-contacted agreed to participate in the programme, it is clear that timely intervention by the adviser either by letter or by telephone achieved greater participation in the programme than would otherwise have been the case.

6.1.3 Early starters

The most common route into the programme was in response to a letter of invitation from an adviser to participate in the programme. However, lone parents also came forward in advance of receiving such an invitation. While a portion of these lone parents were from the target group and would have received an invitation to participate in due course, others had children below school age, and thus were from outside the target group. Survey findings indicate that almost one in ten of those attending an initial interview were ‘early starters’ from the target group \(^26\). Typically, those coming forward without having received an invitation did so through their local Benefits Agency (BA) office or Jobcentre or by telephoning one of the social security enquiry lines listed in their IS payment book. They were then referred to an adviser from the programme.

On the whole, ‘early starters’ had rather different motivations for participating in the programme than other lone parents. Broadly, two distinct groups can be identified. The first group comprises lone parents who were beginning or had already embarked on a search for employment prior to involvement in the programme. They had sometimes heard about the programme through publicity or other means and felt it could help with their search for work. Also in this group were lone parents who were unaware of the existence of the programme and were simply reaching out for ‘somebody to help’ them in their search for employment.

The second group of ‘early starters’ were more advanced in their search for work. Indeed, many had already found a job prior to coming into contact with the programme, although few had actually commenced employment. For these lone parents, their involvement with the programme was less concerned with looking for help to find work and more with supporting and confirming their decision to work. Of chief concern to these lone parents was that the job that they had already found would make them better off financially and, consequently, their primary need was for benefit information, in particular information on eligibility.

\(^26\) The survey was designed to include only lone parents who would have received a letter inviting participation. Thus, it did not capture ‘early starters’ from outside the target group.
and application procedures for Family Credit (FC), as well as some form of financial reassurance.

Typically, 'early starters' differed appreciably from other lone parents in the prototype area qualitative sample. In general, they presented very few barriers to the labour market, other than a concern for safe and affordable childcare, which was shared by almost all lone parents in both qualitative samples. Furthermore, 'early starters' clearly exhibited an overwhelming motivation to work, and it was often this determination that led them to come into contact with the programme.

'I've been on it [IS] for so long and it is just a form of habit. You just went down to the post office every week and you got X amount of cash, and when he started school and I was just around the house on my own I thought 'What am I doing here...there's a whole out there and I've got a life to live, so do something with it', so I did it.' (Female, 42, youngest child 5, prototype area)

'I didn't want to be on benefit all my life. I don't want to be one of those people that sit at home all day and just look after their children...I thought about me and my daughter's future and that's why I done it.' (Female, 25, youngest child 2, prototype area)

6.2 Participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents

6.2.1 The nature of initial interviews

A key feature of the programme is the initial interview between the lone parent and adviser, wherein the adviser outlines the purpose of the programme and attempts to gain agreement from the lone parent to find work. These interviews generally followed quite quickly upon contact with the lone parent. Indeed, for 'early starters' or those who responded to the initial invitation by calling in to the office, these interviews often took place immediately if an adviser was available.

In some prototype areas, advisers offered lone parents a choice of location for the initial interview - at their home or at the Jobcentre or BA office closest to them. While not all those who were offered a choice of having the interview at home availed themselves of it, many were pleased to have been given the option. Those interviewed at home were happy that the adviser could travel to see them, especially if they lived in a rural area. Interviews in a Jobcentre or a BA office often took place in a private room, which was usually preferred over interviews in an open plan office.

In the qualitative interviews, lone parents sometimes expressed a feeling of apprehension about visiting either a Jobcentre or a BA office. This was often related to previous experiences of such offices. Such buildings caused some lone parents to feel 'nervous' or 'paranoid'. Perhaps because of this, lone parents often brought a friend along with them to the interview for support. In addition, there was sometimes a view that Jobcentres and BA Offices attracted an unsavoury type of character, and there was a worry on the part of some lone parents that their presence there might taint people's perception of them.
A minority of lone parents interviewed in the qualitative study reported being reimbursed for travel expenses incurred by attending the initial interview and were pleased, if not surprised, that it was on offer. Those living at some distance from the office saw this as especially useful.

There was considerable diversity in the length of interview reported in both the prototype area qualitative sample and in the survey. Nearly a half of all participants in the survey (47%) said that their initial interview lasted up to half an hour or so. However, about a third (34%) had an initial interview that took an hour or more. In the qualitative interviews the length of interview varied both within and between prototype areas.

6.2.2 The role of the Adviser

Chapter 4 and 5 outlined the key barriers which lone parents face in their entry to the labour market. Clearly, any programme which attempts to foster employment among lone parents must accomplish two key tasks. Firstly, it must be capable of dealing with the 'practical' aspects of helping lone parents into work, such as providing in-work benefit information, identifying safe and affordable childcare, or developing possible strategies for looking for jobs. Secondly, it must be able to motivate lone parents and be able to bolster their confidence that it is possible to find work. A programme that relies on individual advisers to fulfil these two tasks is largely dependent on the effectiveness of these advisers for its success.

It is clear from experiences recounted in the course of the qualitative interviews that there is wide variability in the perceived effectiveness of advisers in carrying out the two tasks outlined above. Lone parents clearly delineated between an 'effective' adviser and an 'ineffective' adviser. There was little evidence from the qualitative study that participants expectations of the programme influenced the perceived variability in effectiveness. Moreover, this distinction was generally based on the impressions gained from interaction with the adviser during the initial interview and during subsequent contacts.

Lone parents' portrayal of their adviser broadly centred on their personal characteristics, how they did their job and how they related to the lone parent. Figure 6.3 illustrates the difference between these two types of advisers, in relation to each of these three aspects of the role. There was no evidence that this distinction was area related, since both 'effective' and 'ineffective' advisers were found within the same area.

'Effective' advisers were described as friendly, outgoing, positive and enthusiastic, and at the same time lone parents remarked that such advisers' relaxed and confident demeanour encouraged them to feel at ease during

\footnote{The question of whether survey data show any area variation, either in the length of interview or in any other aspect of the participation process, will be examined in the final report, which is due to be published in Autumn 1999.}
the interview. Those who had come to the interview feeling nervous especially valued this. ‘Effective’ advisers were capable of fulfilling the practical aspects of the role and were repeatedly described as ‘clear’, ‘knowledgeable’ and ‘thorough’ in job search advice and in their assistance with in work benefits. There was a recurrent view that these advisers helped them to build their self-confidence that greatly increased their motivation to find work. ‘Effective’ advisers were commonly described as being ‘understanding’ or ‘interested’, and their willingness to listen gave lone parents a clear indication that they were accessible and that they had time for them. Perhaps most importantly, ‘effective’ advisers were seen to be non-judgemental and lone parents repeatedly said that they felt that they had been treated with respect. Participants with ‘effective’ advisers sometimes recounted that the adviser engaged with them ‘as if you were somebody and not just a name on a piece of paper’. For some, this was a welcome change of attitude in comparison with previous encounters with the BA, and to a lesser extent with the ES, though few lone parents said they had used Jobcentres in the past.

'I thought there would be this stiff chap or woman sitting behind this desk and ‘this is what you will do’ and ‘this is how we can help you’ and ‘why haven’t you done this’ and ‘why haven’t you done that’. But it wasn't like that at all…it was informal but formal. I mean they obviously have a job to do but just the way they went about it was really good.' (Female, 37, youngest child 8, prototype area)

'He was brilliant…nothing seemed too much trouble…he made us feel like we were people…by his attitude. He didn’t sit there going ‘yeah, yeah, I know’ and ‘you’re all the same’…he didn’t judge you, do you know what I mean? Because like I say, the first time I went up the social, I just hadn’t got a clue, and they make you feel like you’re the scum off the streets some of them.’ (Female, 31, youngest child 6, prototype area)

'I needed someone else to say ‘Yeah Sarah’, that’s okay, you’re doing fine there’…or, you know, if I was doing wrong, what I was doing wrong…I needed to know that…I left there feeling well, I’m doing it right and, you know, I’m on the right track…after years of doing nothing. So I did need that…boost.' (Female, 35, youngest child 15, prototype area)

'She was ever so good and we felt good when we came out of there. Normally you go in there and think ‘Oh my God, lets hide our head in shame’…we felt quite good when we came out of there and felt, you know, it was worth it and just speaking to her was really nice because she was just so helpful, so nice and relaxed, and not pushy or rushing us at all. If we wanted to go over something again she would go over it, quite happily…she said ‘ring up if you’re not sure of something, just ring me up’. She was really good like that…that sort of side of it is good. It just makes you feel a bit more...

70 Any names used in quotations have been changed to preserve anonymity.
positive...and I mean now, if I had any trouble now, all I need do is ring her up and she'll be there, so that'll be handy.’ (Female, 29, youngest child 7, prototype area)

By stark contrast, ‘ineffective’ advisers were rarely seen in such a light. Moreover, lone parents repeatedly described them as lacking confidence in their role. In addition, there was sometimes a view that these advisers were not good at dealing with people. Such advisers were repeatedly described as ‘inexperienced’, ‘unclear’ and ‘wishy-washy’, to the extent that sometimes it was felt that the adviser didn’t seem to know what they were doing. While these ‘ineffective’ advisers appeared capable of fulfilling the practical aspects of the role such as giving benefit information, completing better off calculations or initiating a job search, they appeared to interviewees to do so with little enthusiasm or vigour. To this end, those who had attended interviews remarked that ‘ineffective’ advisers rarely gave the support, encouragement or advice they had hoped for and, consequently, they spoke of their experiences with the adviser with some disappointment. It was clear from accounts given during the qualitative interviews that such advisers were devoid of the motivational and confidence building skills that underscore the success of an ‘effective’ adviser. Furthermore, there was sometimes a view among participants that ‘ineffective’ advisers possessed a somewhat condescending attitude towards lone parents.

‘I would have thought that she would have helped by saying ‘right, here’s some literature...here’s what you can do to better yourself...to get into a shop, to work in say C & A’s...you need these qualifications’...If you don’t know what you’re aiming at to begin with...you’re like chucking yourself into a maze and it’s fine when you’re by yourself but when you’ve got a lot going on around you with your family, you think ‘God, is it even worth it?’ (Female, 44, youngest child 6, prototype area)

‘To me it felt like he was a bit condescending really, ‘well, you know how to do this’ and ‘we’ll do this and you do this’...in the end I just looked at him and I said well you know I should be sitting where you’re sitting and you should be sitting here...he just didn’t have the right approach.’ (Female, 35, youngest child 14, prototype area)

‘What I really wanted to hear...was something concrete...‘well, if you’re interested in that type of work, what about visiting XYZ company’ or ‘here is the childcare that will be available from here, you can get help with that now from here’. But there wasn’t any of that, there was nothing concrete, it was all sort of airy fairy and it just seemed pointless for me...I ended up telling her...it just degraded into silliness in the end’. (Female, 43, youngest child 9, prototype area)

However, even the attempts of ‘effective’ advisers to assist lone parents into work were often thwarted by the insuperable barriers to work which lone parents regularly face. This occurred particularly when the lone parent was found not to be financially better off in work, often because of
6.2.3 Co cut of the
terr'ieivs the cost of high mortgage repayments. However, in these circumstances, 'effective' advisers still managed to give the impression that they were doing everything possible for the lone parent. Such support was clearly valued.

Figure 6.3 The 'effective' and 'ineffective' adviser

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal characteristics</th>
<th>'Effective'</th>
<th>'Ineffective'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>friendly, outgoing, down-to-earth, positive, informal, relaxed</td>
<td>unconfident, not good at dealing with people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How they do their job</td>
<td>knowledgeable, clear, thorough, available, reassuring, understanding, supportive, listens and is interested, motivating, builds confidence, convinces that it is worthwhile going out to work, works for the lone parents best interests</td>
<td>not well informed, unclear, inexperienced, doesn't seem to know what they are doing, no encouragement or advice, doesn't discuss worries, doesn't take on board needs, doesn't suggest clear courses of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How they relate to the lone parent</td>
<td>non-judgemental, with respect, treats the lone parent like a person, doesn't make the lone parent feel inferior</td>
<td>sometimes condescending</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.2.3 Content of the interviews

The variable quality of advisers often led to inconsistency in the content of interviews. From the prototype area qualitative interviews, it appeared that both 'ineffective' and 'effective' advisers managed to include 'basic' items in the interview, such as collection of personal information, discussion of work and training opportunities, benefit information, in-work benefit calculation and childcare. However, 'effective' advisers tended to cover these items in more depth. 'Effective' advisers were also likely to spend time during the initial interview discussing ambitions, personal needs and circumstances, worries and concerns about remaining on benefit or about finding work. Those who had 'effective' advisers were more inclined to leave the initial interview with a clear course of action, while those with 'ineffective' advisers often commented that they were less than clear following the initial interview about how they should proceed with their search for work. Consequently, the longer interviews tended to be with the more 'effective' advisers.

The action pack It was anticipated at the outset that potential participants would be given a copy of the 'New Deal for Lone Parents Action Pack' at their initial interview with the adviser, which contains information about moving into work, together with information on benefits, childcare and relevant local organisations. This was produced in print and bound in a glossy folder. It was also produced on audiotape.
Not everyone interviewed in the prototype area qualitative sample received a copy of the printed action pack. Nobody received a copy of the audiotape. While advisers had been instructed to use their discretion in distributing the action pack, some participants who didn’t receive a copy did comment upon seeing it during the research interview that it would have been useful to them. Also, those who expressed a preference for listening over reading remarked that it would have been helpful to listen to the audiotape.

Among those who received the action pack the response was very mixed. Those who found the pack helpful commented that it was ‘like a back up reference guide’ or that it ‘shows me what to do and when to do it’. Particularly mentioned as beneficial were the examples of in-work benefit calculations given in the folder and the contacts listed at the rear of the folder. There was some evidence that those who lacked confidence or recent experience in looking for work were more likely to find the action pack more beneficial.

Among those who didn’t find the action pack useful, there was a recurrent view that they already knew most of the information contained within it. These lone parents frequently disposed of the action pack soon after receiving it, sometimes without even reading it fully. One lone parent felt that the action pack constituted a waste of a good folder. Rather than dispose of it, she removed the contents and gave it to her child for her schoolwork. The over-riding criticism of the folder was that it was ‘an extravagance’ or ‘a waste of money’ that could be better spent.

**The in-work benefit calculation** Over one-third of survey respondents (38%) who attended an interview with an adviser said that they did not have an in-work benefit calculation. Of those who had a calculation, two in every three reported that their adviser found them to be better off in work. However, seventeen per cent of respondents reported that they were found to be neither better nor worse off, while a further twelve per cent were found to be financially worse off in work. In the prototype area qualitative sample, there was generally a view that the in-work benefit calculation was useful because it ‘lets you know if it’s worth your while’ going to work. However, a minority of lone parents, who had been found to be worse off, highlighted that this acted as a disincentive to find work. The in-work benefit calculation is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

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The audiotape was never intended as simply an alternative choice to the printed Action Pack. It was produced for those who, because of a visual or other impairment, would be unable to read the print version. Therefore, it is not surprising that not many of these tapes were issued.
The nature and number of subsequent contacts between the adviser and the lone parent was clearly influenced by the type of adviser assigned to the case. On the whole, those participants in the prototype area qualitative sample with an 'effective' adviser had a more positive impression of the initial interview and were inclined to be pro-active in contacting their adviser again. This usually stemmed from encouragement given during the initial interview to telephone with any problems or questions. As a result, such participants reported that they regularly telephoned their adviser to discuss ideas for work or to get the adviser to do an in-work benefit calculation for a job they were considering applying for.

Furthermore, 'effective' advisers often fostered a close relationship with the lone parent by telephoning frequently with ideas and suggestions for jobs, to keep the lone parent informed about current vacancies in the area, and just 'to see how things were going'. Those with 'effective' advisers who were now in employment mentioned ringing up the adviser since starting their job to resolve any problems they were having with the transition into work. Furthermore, some of those interviewed who had received help from their adviser with the application for Family Credit mentioned that they might well return for further help when their benefit came up for renewal. This 'aftercare service' was highly valued by those to whom it was offered.

'He rings me at home every month or something like that...he keeps constant contact, I mean, my daughters know him by first name already...I think that's great. I mean it's unbelievable [to have] social security officers like that, and I think it does make a difference...when I pick up the phone and it's Joni (the adviser) on the phone again...not that he's hassling me or anything like that, it doesn't feel like that. It's just - 'are you getting on all right?' - that's how it's become.' (Female, 41, youngest child 15, prototype area)

Conversely, lone parents with 'ineffective' advisers generally had a less than positive impression of the initial interview. Consequently, they were less inclined to contact the adviser again chiefly because they were of the opinion that little could be gained from it. Likewise, 'ineffective' advisers were less likely to make contact with lone parents following an initial interview. In those cases where they had made a bad impression at the initial interview, lone parents were rarely open to further contact.

Such inconsistency in practice clearly leads to differing levels of support being offered to lone parents. Those who have 'effective' advisers dealing with their case tended to have a lot of help and support, whilst those with 'ineffective' advisers received little support from the programme. Furthermore, there was some evidence among those interviewed in the prototype area qualitative sample that support had been withdrawn by 'ineffective' advisers, particularly when barriers to the labour market appeared insurmountable. In circumstances such as these, lone parents
6.3 Views about voluntary participation and the age limit

6.3.1 The voluntary nature of the programme

described feeling ‘abandoned’ by the adviser. This was clearly articulated by one such lone parent who described her experience with her adviser as tantamount to being told ‘don’t waste our time at the moment because you’re not going to get work, are you?’ Such comments underscore the point that continuous support by the adviser is crucial to encouraging, reassuring and supporting the lone parent in their search for work.

There was a recurrent view within both qualitative samples that the voluntary nature of the programme was crucial to its success. Although there were no plans to introduce an element of compulsion in the programme, strong opposition was voiced by lone parents against any future changes in policy. It was felt that any move to enforce participation could ‘back fire’ leading lone parents to take an adversarial stance against the programme and, ultimately, to be less enthusiastic about being involved.

In essence, those interviewed in the qualitative study felt that it was a matter of individual choice to either go to work or to remain at home to care for one’s children. It was strongly argued that it would be wrong to force lone parents to go out to work, and that to do so could have wider repercussions upon society. In this respect, there was sometimes a view that continuous parental care was essential in preventing children from getting into trouble with the police or even from becoming delinquent.

‘There are all kinds of different reasons why people don’t work and they should assess everybody individually. I think [there is] the right attitude now where it’s voluntary and they try to persuade people...they’re introducing themselves gradually...which I think is good.’ (Female, 27, youngest child 1, prototype area)

‘I think [NDLP becoming compulsory] would do more harm because...if someone said you have to go down, naturally you do assume the worse...but I think if it was done like a friendly face, that would be the best because that way people know that if they’re stuck or need a bit of advice, then that’s where they can go.’ (Female, 35, youngest child 15, prototype area)

‘I don’t think people should be forced to do something they don’t want to do...nobody is going to enjoy something they’re forced to do and they’ll just rebel against it and they’ll hate the system for it and use and abuse it.’ (Female, 22, youngest child 5, prototype area)

However, among those interviewed in both qualitative samples, there was sometimes a view that the programme should be compulsory, although such opinions were rarely unconditional. One suggestion was that it should be compulsory for all lone parents, unless they were in bad health or had young children out of school. Other suggestions focused entirely on the age of the youngest child and argued that the programme should be compulsory for all those whose youngest child was in full-time education or, alternatively, whose youngest child was in secondary school. Another proposal favoured making the initial interview with the adviser compulsory but not the job search or the entry into the labour market.
6.3.2 The age limit for participation

There was much support among those interviewed in both qualitative samples for extending the target population to include all lone parents. There was generally a view - among both targeted and non-targeted lone parents - that those currently excluded from the target population should be given the choice of participating in the programme. Many believed that the programme would be especially beneficial in preventing younger lone parents from getting stuck in the 'rut' of lone parenthood because 'once you're in a rut it's very difficult to get out'. It was felt that younger women would be more accustomed to the labour market and have more recent experience of working, thus facilitating an easier and swifter return to work. However, it was argued that it would be difficult to extend the programme to lone parents with younger children because they would have a greater need for childcare, which wasn't always easily available or affordable.

Key findings in Chapter 6

- On first hearing of the programme, lone parents' impressions were somewhat mixed, though they were generally more positive than negative.
- The survey found that as many as 78% of the targeted lone parents did not participate and that non-participation was more likely among lone parents with larger numbers of children, a lower level of work experience, or those without regular access to childcare.
- The effectiveness of the adviser in the delivery of the programme is pivotal to its success. In the qualitative interviews, participants made a clear distinction between 'effective' and 'ineffective' advisers.
- 'Effective' advisers were described as friendly, outgoing, positive and enthusiastic, and at the same time participants remarked that such advisers' relaxed and confident demeanour encouraged them to feel at ease during the interview. By stark contrast, 'ineffective' advisers were rarely seen in such a light. Such advisers were repeatedly described as 'inexperienced', 'unclear' and 'wishy-washy'.
- This inconsistency in the delivery of the programme clearly had implications for the content of interviews, as well as the level and type of contact between the adviser and the lone parent following the initial interview.
- There was a recurrent view within the qualitative samples that the voluntary nature of the programme was crucial to its success, however, there was also widespread support for extending the target population to include all lone parents.
This chapter explores the effect of the New Deal for Lone Parents in assisting lone parents into paid work. In addition, it will reflect early indications on whether the programme has made a difference to the lives of lone parents in the prototype areas and illustrate the benefits of the programme from the point of view of participants. This analysis draws entirely on the data from the qualitative component of the evaluation.

### 7.1 The path to paid employment

The principal objective of the New Deal for Lone Parents is to assist lone parents in finding work. Following contact with the programme, lone parents can be situated along a continuum of distance from or nearness to employment, that is, from being on benefit and not looking for work, to being in work and no longer receiving benefit. This continuum, demonstrated in Figure 7.1, comprises five stages:

- Not looking for work at present (‘On hold’).
- Looking for work.
- In work on Income Support.
- In work on Family Credit.
- In work off benefit.

The end point on the continuum may well be ‘in work off benefit’, but it was rare for lone parents in the prototype area sample to see this as an immediate goal. More usually, lone parents were focused on getting to or staying in the ‘in work on Family Credit’ or, to a lesser extent, the ‘in work on Income Support’ stage of the continuum.

These stages are by no means rigid and there is some indication of fluidity between them. Indeed, while the general trend was towards getting off benefit and into work, there were some lone parents who reported having moved in the opposite direction in the past - returning to benefit from having been in work. Such movement back and forth along the continuum is attributable to three central factors that are clearly inter-related:

- **Barriers to the labour market:**
  
  Barriers, such as lack of access to safe and affordable childcare, hamper the shift towards work for lone parents at all stages along the continuum.

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30 Figure 7.1 gives an overview of the characteristics of lone parents at each stage of the continuum. However, it should be noted that these are based on the prototype area qualitative sample which while, purposively selected to provide maximum diversity, should not be assumed to be statistically representative of all lone parents.

31 This refers to income-related benefits only, such as Income Support or Family Credit. It does not include universal benefits such as Child Benefit.
but vary somewhat in their effect. For example, barriers can hamper the progress of those currently 'looking for work', while those same barriers can prevent those 'in work on Income Support' and 'in work on Family Credit' from increasing the number of hours worked. Furthermore, barriers can also cause a move away from work and towards benefit. For example, the failure of childcare arrangements could cause a lone parent to give up her or his job. 'Early starters' to the programme generally reported very few barriers and were more likely to be 'in work on FC'.

- **The motivation to work:**
  Those who were 'in work on FC' were often the most highly motivated to work. Conversely, those 'on hold' were often the least motivated towards paid work.

- **The effect of the programme:**
  Some lone parents interviewed made a clear and unambiguous link between the help and support they received from the programme and their success in getting a job. In this respect, it could be argued that the programme has contributed to helping lone parents into paid work. Nevertheless, this effect was evident only where the lone parent had an 'effective' adviser. Whatever the lone parents' circumstances, 'effective' advisers were often adept at tailoring the programme to suit their needs. Lone parents with 'ineffective' advisers clearly relied much more on their own motivation to work rather than any assistance or encouragement from the programme.

While the continuum demonstrates the position of lone parents interviewed in their distance from or nearness to employment, following contact with the programme, it masks the multifarious routes which lone parents take into and out of paid work. Some of those 'looking for work' may go straight to 'in work on FC', bypassing the 'in work on IS' stage altogether. Similarly, those 'in work on IS' may jump to 'in work off benefit' without ever receiving FC. Furthermore, as discussed above, there is some evidence of movement back along the continuum. Changes in the lone parents' circumstances could well cause a shift from being 'in work off benefit' back to 'in work on FC' or, even further back along the continuum, to other stages of working or not working.

The diversity in employment goals and the differing routes lone parents take to fulfil them emphasise that programme advisers are dealing with lone parents at different places in relation to employment. Clearly, this has significant implications for what they need from the programme. In the prototype areas, the difference in lone parents' estimation of their advisers may well be a reflection of the ability of individual advisers to tailor the programme to fit the specific needs of their client. Clearly, to effectively assist all lone parents in their search for work, the programme needs to adapt to and cater for these differing needs. What follows is an overview of the path which lone parents take to paid work, which highlights the different circumstances and needs which lone parents face at each stage.
**'On hold'**
- targeted lone parents
- mixed age and gender
- not ready and not looking for work

**Looking for work**
- mainly targeted lone parents
- predominately women actively seeking work
- clear motivation to work preference for part-time work
- acute barriers to labour market

**In work on IS**
- mainly targeted lone parents
- entirely women
- strong motivation to work
- two groups: those who had work prior to NDLP; those who found work after NDLP
- mixed aspirations to continue further along the continuum

**Towards being in work off benefit**
- mainly targeted lone parents
- entirely women
- strong motivation to work
- two groups: those who had work prior to NDLP; those who found work after NDLP
- mixed aspirations to continue further along the continuum

*Sometimes movement towards benefit having been in work*
This stage comprises three groups of targeted lone parents - those who didn't respond to invitations to participate; those who responded but declined to participate; and those who attended an initial interview but gave reasons why they currently could not look for work. They were of various ages and included both men and women. There was some diversity in length of time they had spent out of the labour market, ranging from some who had recent work experience, to others who had been out of the labour market for a considerable length of time. A minority had never worked. Previous work experience was almost entirely of non-skilled, manual or retail positions.

Broadly, these lone parents felt that they were currently not ready, and therefore not looking, for work. There were a variety of reasons for this:

- **The wish to provide continuous parental care:**
  There was a recurrent view that the state should afford lone parents the choice to stay at home to provide continuous care for their children until they themselves felt the time was 'right' to go to work. Those who expressed this view generally felt that the search for work would begin when their youngest child was 'older'. However, there was considerable diversity of opinion about when this would be. There was sometimes a view that a parent shouldn't work until their child was settled in full-time education and no longer needed continuous support from them. The entry of the child into secondary school was also seen as a time when they, as parents, could begin to go to work. Furthermore, there were some lone parents who believed that continuous parental care should last until a child completed their education, or at least until they were judged as independent enough to survive without parental support and guidance. There was concern, for some parents, that the welfare of their children would suffer should they return to work. Previous episodes of a child's emotional instability resulting, for example, from incidents of physical abuse or from the parents' separation, were sometimes recounted during interviews.

- **Ill health:**
  Problems with the lone parent's own health or the health of other family members figured prominently in the reasons for not looking for work. It was felt by some that their health condition prohibited them from working at the present time. Others had been given specific instructions by their GP not to look for work. In addition, the ill health of children, particularly asthmatic children, was mentioned by some as preventing them from currently searching for work.

- **The trauma of lone-parenthood:**
  The trauma of lone-parenthood, such as dealing with separation and divorce, was sometimes felt to curtail the search for work. In particular, it was felt that the period of transition from being with a partner, to being alone, was a time when it was impossible to look for work. In addition, some were currently embroiled in legal battles with their ex-
partner and found this demanded a lot of their energies which otherwise could be focused on looking for work.

The lone fathers interviewed in both qualitative samples reported that lone-parenthood was especially traumatic for them, chiefly because men in general were unaccustomed to fulfilling the role of sole parent. This was often cited as the reason for not looking for work at the present time. In this respect, many of the lone fathers interviewed were 'on hold'.

- **Completing education:**
  A minority of lone parents in this group were currently in education and not at present seeking work. However, they planned to do so on completion of their studies.

**Case Study 1 – On Hold**

Laura is a 39-year-old mother of three, the youngest of whom is 12 years old. She currently receives Income Support, along with other passported benefits. She’s been a lone parent since shortly after the birth of her second child when her relationship with her physically abusive husband ended. She has had relationships with men since divorcing but has always lived alone with her children.

Laura has not been in paid employment since the birth of her first child but she currently does some voluntary foster care of children. She is not currently looking for paid work and has no plans to do so until all her children have finished school. Her over-riding concern is to be there to care for her children: ‘All I want to do is be here for the kids knowing where they are, knowing what they’re up to… it’s my responsibility’.

She received a letter from a programme adviser, which she ignored, though she did worry that her benefits would be affected by not participating. She feels that while the New Deal for Lone Parents may have a lot to offer other lone parents, should they choose to go out to work, it has nothing to offer her at this stage. Laura expects to return to work in three or four-years' time, when her youngest son is due to leave school.

It was commonly felt by those ‘on hold’ that little could be gained from the programme at the present time. While many expressed a wish to use the programme in the future, when their circumstances changed, their current responsibilities to their children, their health, or other concerns took precedence over their search for work.

7.1.2 **Looking for work**

This stage comprises mainly lone parents whose youngest child was of school age who had, at the very least, completed an initial interview with a programme adviser. They tended to be of a mixed age group and predominantly female. Only a minority of lone fathers featured in this
group. In general, these lone parents had moved further along the path towards being in paid work since they were currently actively seeking work. Similar to those 'on hold', there was some variation within this group in the length of time spent out of the labour market. However, all in this group had previous work experience, ranging from unskilled manual work to semi-professional employment. Most striking was the level of work readiness among these lone parents. All expressed a clear motivation to enter the labour market, generally fuelled by a wish to move off benefit and become more independent - 'to do things for myself'.

On the whole, the preference in this group was for part-time work, though those with teenage children did sometimes express a wish to work full-time. Work ambitions varied considerably, although several mentioned that they did not wish to be involved in 'silly work', typically seen to be work which is low skilled and low paid.

While barriers to the labour market (discussed earlier in Chapters 4 & 5) can potentially impact upon all lone parents, it was among the lone parents in this group that such barriers appeared most acute. Repeatedly, those lone parents 'looking for work' described a plethora of barriers working together to prevent their entry into the labour market.

The effect of the programme on this group was quite varied. Clearly, the programme had, for some, merely formalised a search for work that had already begun prior to involvement. Others, however, seemed to have genuinely benefited from the advice and support offered by the programme advisers and had begun to look for work following their interview with the adviser. However, it is evident that such benefit was only achieved through the work of an 'effective' adviser. 'Ineffective' advisers rarely aid those looking for work. Those with 'ineffective' advisers were clearly looking for work, but were doing so on their own momentum, without support from the programme.
Case Study 2 - Looking for Work

Alison is a 34-year-old mother of two sons aged twelve and eighteen years. She has always been a lone parent in receipt of benefit. While possessing very little work experience, Alison expressed a strong desire to get off benefit and to find work to better herself - ‘I want a career, I want to start at the bottom and work my way up if I’ve got to do that’. She has been especially keen to do this since her children have reached an age where she feels they no longer need to be cared for while she works.

The main barrier preventing Alison from working is confidence. She sometimes suffers panic attacks and, at times, finds it difficult to even leave her own home. There are occasions where she feels very alone and isolated – ‘you feel like it’s just you…a black hole with no light at the end of the tunnel’. Compounding this, her lack of skills and qualifications prevent her from applying for many of the jobs that she would like to do.

Alison was very interested in the letter she received about the New Deal for Lone Parents and telephoned the programme office immediately to make an appointment. Following her initial interview, she has had several contacts with the adviser where they have discussed her continuing search for work. Alison would like to do clerical work but up until now her adviser has only been able to offer retail positions in which she’s not interested.

Alison has a very good relationship with her adviser, who she considers to be ‘like a friend now’. She feels that her contact with the adviser has improved her confidence. However, she also feels that she would benefit from interacting with other lone parents - ‘someone else that’s doing what you want to do…so you can all relate to certain things or how you feel…it’s not you alone’. She is hopeful that, assisted by her adviser, her efforts to find work will eventually be fruitful.

7.1.3 In work on Income Support

These lone parents could be said to be at the mid-point of the continuum of nearness to or distance from employment, in that while being on benefit, there are also in part-time paid work. Comprised entirely of women, this group was of various ages and all had previous work experience. Current employment was primarily in the retail or service industry. There was some variation in when they had found work. Broadly two groups can be identified:

- those who had work prior to involvement in the programme:
  These lone parents generally had been employed for several years and were ‘in work on IS’ when they came into contact with the programme.
- **those who found work after involvement with the programme:**
  These lone parents found work following contact with the programme. There were mixed views about whether their employment was attributable to involvement in the programme. It was clear that, for some, involvement with the programme had aided their search for work. Others, however, were adamant that they would have found work without the help of the programme.

There was generally a view - among those 'in work on IS' - that the ceiling imposed on earnings while in receipt of IS acted as a disincentive to move from benefit into work. As a result, there were some who worked only enough to earn the £15 allowed under the earnings disregard on IS. Others earned more than £15 but worked insufficient hours to qualify for receipt of FC. In addition, the amount earned often varied from week to week, which made it difficult to determine a fixed amount of IS to which they were entitled. Consequently, those who earned more than £15 reported having to submit pay slips to the BA on a regular basis so that their entitlement could be re-assessed. These lone parents often bemoaned this practice and repeatedly described it as a 'hassle'.

On the whole, views about increasing the amount of hours worked were quite mixed. There were some who were not currently looking for further work. Nevertheless, these lone parents did express a wish to work more hours at some point in the future, typically when their children were older. Alternatively, current employment was viewed by some as a stepping-stone to working and receiving FC or ultimately working without receiving any benefits. These lone parents were currently looking for further work.

However, for those wishing to move further along the continuum, the transition from working and receiving IS to working and receiving FC was often obstructed by seemingly insurmountable barriers. The perceived financial risk involved in this transition was of key concern. It was so long since many had paid rent or council tax that they lacked confidence in their ability to manage on their own, without the 'security' offered by IS. This view was sometimes founded on previous experience of being worse off financially when in receipt of FC. Fear of a recurrence of this prevented these lone parents from increasing the number of hours they worked. Childcare was also a concern for these lone parents. Much of their current employment was during times when the children were at school. If childcare was used it was generally provided by family or friends. It was argued that working longer hours would necessitate paying for childcare, which would incur significant cost. In addition, there was some reservation about leaving children alone with childminders.
The effect of the programme on this group of lone parents was again quite varied. For those who found work after involvement in the programme, there is evidence that this was sometimes attributable to the work of the advisor. In such cases, it can be argued that the programme has caused a shift towards work. However, there are also those who have always been 'in work on IS' and who have not progressed beyond this point. This was sometimes because of a personal wish not to increase the number of hours worked or because the barriers to the labour market appeared insuperable. However, there is also evidence to suggest that 'ineffective' advisers have not aided the progress of those who wish to increase the number of hours they work.

Case Study 3 - In work on Income Support

Deborah is forty years old and has two sons aged 17 and 14. Her eldest son now lives outside the household. She has been a lone parent for 11 years since her marriage ended. Her husband has since re-married and has no contact with the children.

Deborah currently receives Income Support and other passported benefits. In addition, she works part time for 6 hours a week as a lunch time supervisor at a local primary school, which she has done since 1987. She wants to work more hours and has been looking for suitable work for some time because she feels her youngest son is now old enough to look after himself while she is at work. She is also aware that she cannot claim Income Support once her youngest son is 16 years old and doesn't want to be in a situation where she is looking for work at that 'late' stage.

In 1993, Deborah took on an extra job as a care assistant and moved from Income Support to Family Credit. However, she got into debt during the transition which eventually caused her to give up the extra job and return to claiming Income Support. This experience has caused her to fear any future move from Income Support to Family Credit.

Deborah first heard about the New Deal for Lone Parents on television. Shortly afterwards she received a letter to which she immediately replied because she felt it meant 'either get a job or we'll cut your benefit'. She has had one short interview with her adviser wherein she was told that she wouldn't be better off working more hours and she would be re-contacted within six months to see if her situation had changed. As a result she feels she hasn't benefited from her contact with the programme.
Comprised entirely of women, this group contained targeted lone parents, as well as 'early starters'. They were all in paid work for at least 16 hours per week, and received a salary that was topped up with Family Credit. Their jobs were in the retail or service industry, as well as clerical or care work. All had previous work experience. There was considerable difference in the length of time spent out of the labour market, ranging from those who had worked recently before getting their current job, to those who had not worked for several years. Perhaps the most striking quality in this group was the overwhelming motivation to work. The concentration of 'early starters' within this group who, as pointed out in Chapter 6, were amongst the most highly motivated, is clear evidence of this.

There was significant variation in when those 'in work on FC' had found work. Two distinct groups can be identified:

- **those who found work prior to involvement but had not yet commenced employment:**
  Generally, these were 'early starters' to the programme who were looking for support and benefit information rather than assistance with finding work.

- **those who found work after contact with the programme:**
  These comprised both 'early starters' and targeted lone parents. In general, these lone parents were looking for assistance with finding work and found their work after contact with the programme. Several of these lone parents attributed their current employment to participation in the programme.

Previous experience of the transition from IS to FC, as well as accounts from others of their experience, had caused it to be regarded with considerable apprehension. However, it was commonly reported that 'fast track' FC, facilitated by the adviser, was 'quick' and 'straightforward'. However, there was a minority for whom the transition was somewhat problematic. There were some reports of waiting a long time (on one occasion for a period of eight weeks) to receive a first payment of FC. These lone parents often relied on friends and family for financial assistance during that time.

There was a recurrent view that being on FC was entirely different to being on IS. When in receipt of IS, many people were made to feel that they were 'scrounging taxpayers' money'. However, being on FC was regarded in a significantly different light. For some, being on FC represented the independence they were seeking when they first began their search for work. While acknowledging that they were still receiving a form of benefit, the very fact that they were working gave these lone parents a feeling that they were contributing to society.
‘You are doing something, you are earning that money. Okay, they top your money up, which is very nice, but that’s for the children, that’s not for me. At the end of the day, you’re going out and earning that money. You’re not one of these in a long line on Income Support. You have got a job…you are worth something to somebody, somebody wants you to work for them and there isn’t any better feeling than that to me.’ (Female, 36, youngest child 1, prototype area)

Among those interviewed in the prototype area qualitative sample, there was very low take-up of the childcare disregard available to parents in receipt of FC. On the whole, those receiving FC, like other lone parents interviewed in both qualitative samples, were distrustful of registered childcare, a necessary requirement for claiming the childcare disregard. Recent television documentaries were often cited as the reason for this. However, previous experience with registered childcare was also a factor in the reticence to use it again. A minority reported incidents where they were unhappy about the treatment their child received while under the care of a registered childminder. As a result, many worked during school hours only or relied on informal means of childcare such as friends or family members when their children were not in school. This was often a source of concern for those ‘in work on FC’, especially in view of the forthcoming summer holidays. It was felt that 6 weeks was too long a time to rely on friends and family to care for one’s children. Some feared that they might have to give up their job rather than place their children in the care of someone unknown to them. In addition, the predominant use of informal means of childcare by those ‘in work on FC’ does raise the question whether those without access to informal childcare are as successful in moving into work.

In general, these lone parents worked the minimum amount of hours necessary to qualify for FC, usually between 16 and 20 hours per week, and there was little desire among them to increase the number of hours they worked. It was repeatedly stated that working more hours would result in being financially worse off. Some reported that they had worked full-time in the past and had ‘struggled’ to survive financially.

There was a recurrent view that work needed to be balanced with spending time with children, to achieve what was described as ‘a happy medium’. For some it was difficult to ‘see the point in having kids if you’re spending all your time working’. It was felt that the move to full-time work off benefit would come later, generally when the children were older. There was some difference in opinion about the optimum age for this to occur. ‘Early starters’ with pre-school aged children, generally felt that this would be when the child was settled in full-time education. However, those whose children were already in full-time education, were more inclined to regard the move to full-time work as something that would happen when their children were in secondary school or, for some, when they had left full-time education.
Case Study 4 - In work on Family Credit

Jane is 35 years old with three children, the youngest of whom is five. She currently works 16 hours per week as an assistant in a clothing shop. She receives a weekly salary that is topped up with Family Credit. Previously she had been in receipt of Income Support since ending her relationship with the father of her youngest child about two years ago.

Jane has always had a positive attitude towards work but felt that because of her responsibilities to her children, she was unable to work until they had reached school age. When this occurred, she became bored with spending all her time at home and prospects of extra income tipped the scales in favour of work. Unsure whether working would make her better off financially, she decided to approach the BA through the social security enquiry line, and was referred to a programme adviser. She had some initial apprehension about visiting the office, but her adviser bolstered her confidence and made her feel that she could 'get this, get that, do this, do that'. ‘I was on cloud nine when I walked out of there, I was buzzing and it was a long time since I felt like that…I felt good and I thought this could be a turning point for me’.

While somewhat daunted by her search for work, she found her current job by approaching employers directly. Despite being happy in her current job, problems with childcare remain a threat to her long-term employment. She relies on her family to care for her children while she works and is especially concerned about the forthcoming summer holidays from school when family members will not be available to care for her children over the 6-week period. This may cause her to give up her job. She would rather do this than leave her children with ‘strangers’.

Jane believes that the New Deal for Lone Parents has helped her greatly in her search for work. She feels that her adviser’s caring attitude, encouragement, and assistance with details made it easy for her to find a job. She would thoroughly recommend the programme to others.

Among those who are ‘in work on FC’, there is also evidence of an adviser effect. On the whole, their experience with the adviser was very positive. Even those who had found work prior to their involvement in the programme were often complimentary about the help and support they had received from their adviser. Among lone parents who had an ‘effective’ adviser, there is clear evidence of a programme effect in helping them to find work, and also of aiding those who had already found work to make a transition from IS to FC. While there was a minority who reported less than positive experiences with their adviser, such experiences did not seem to deter them from finding work nor from making the
transition. In such cases, it would appear that a high motivation to work often compensates for an 'ineffective' adviser.

Furthermore, while, clearly, there is evidence of the programme assisting some lone parents in their search for work, the 'in work' figures may be somewhat inflated by those who found work on their own prior to involvement in the programme. This was clearly illustrated by one such lone parent who remarked that 'I was a success story without them actually doing anything'.

7.1.5 In work off benefit

The logical conclusion of the continuum of distance from or nearness to employment is being in work off benefit. However, within the prototype area qualitative sample, only one person had moved off benefit completely and was now working full-time. An 'early starter', she already had her job when coming into contact with programme and was solely looking for advice on whether she would be entitled to any in-work benefits. However, while there is little evidence of those interviewed reaching the point of being 'in work off benefit' as a result of the programme, it is clear from interviews that many wished to be in work off benefit at some stage in the future. Given the timing of this report, in the preliminary stages of evaluation, future evaluation work could well uncover longer-term programme effects, including assisting lone parents into work and off benefit completely.

7.1.6 Lone parents in the control areas

Given that the control area qualitative sample was chosen from areas where the programme had not yet been launched, it can only be speculated what effect the programme could have for lone parents outside the prototype areas. Overall, there was a low level of employment within the qualitative control sample. Consequently, the majority of lone parents interviewed would be located in the earlier stages of the path to paid work, typically in the 'on hold' and 'looking for work' stages. However, the primary focus for the control area qualitative sample was lone parents in receipt of Income Support. Thus, lone parents in receipt of Family Credit are not represented by it.

Earlier chapters of this report have outlined the barriers faced by lone parents in finding work, barriers that were remarkably similar across both qualitative samples. Given such commonality, it is fair to assume that the programme could be effective outside the prototype areas, so long as it is administered by 'effective' advisers.

Towards the end of interviews with lone parents in the qualitative control sample, respondents were asked about their knowledge of the New Deal for Lone Parents. As noted in Chapter 6, knowledge of the programme within the control sample was very low. However, on being given a description of the programme by the interviewer, lone parents in the control sample repeatedly stated that such a programme would greatly
aid their search for work. Furthermore, what is especially striking about the qualitative control sample interviews is the almost universal desire for a helping hand into work. This was expressed by many lone parents during the interviews, generally in advance of the programme being mentioned by the interviewer. In fact, some of the descriptions of what was needed to help them into work are remarkably similar to what the programme currently offers to lone parents within the prototype areas. Clearly, there is much in the programme that could benefit lone parents in the control areas.

'I've never had a back to work plan, yet they do it for these unemployed people who haven't got children, every six months, or whatever it is, they have to go on a Restart course... Now I think if they did that with more single mums while the children were at school... if they said to me come to our office for nine-thirty and we'll give you five hours of like job search and explaining what benefits you'll get, and you'll get childcare... then I'd go into it [work], but at the moment, I don't know'. (Female, 26, youngest child 5, control area)

In the absence of this helping hand into work, the barriers faced by lone parents in the qualitative control sample often appeared to be somewhat impenetrable. Certainly, when compared to lone parents with 'effective' advisers in the prototype area sample, lone parents appeared very much alone in attempting to tackle these barriers.

The diversity of opinion among participants about whether the programme had made a difference appears closely related to whether the lone parent had an 'effective' or 'ineffective' adviser. Those who were insistent that the programme had made little or no difference to their lives generally described their experience of the initial interview with the adviser as less than positive. Conversely, those who were complimentary about their adviser repeatedly identified benefits from their experience with the programme.

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This was also the case with the lone parents interviewed as part of the evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents Innovative Schemes; see Woodfield and Finch (1999).
Consequently, the criticisms voiced by participants who felt the programme had made no difference to their lives often highlighted gaps in the service provided by their ‘ineffective’ adviser, which repeatedly accorded with the ‘extra’ services provided by ‘effective’ advisers. In particular, these lone parents highlighted the need for the encouragement, reassurance and support which ‘effective’ advisers regularly provided to their clients.

‘[I heard] that it would be...kind of an advisory thing, but there would be weight behind it, that there would be real help, you know, steering you towards the kind of work you could do, even referrals to companies or whatever, which would have been brilliant for me, that's the sort of thing I need, I need the step in. I haven't had it, there is no step in.’ (Female 44, youngest child 6, prototype area)

‘It’s not what I expected it to be. I expected encouragement and help and I don’t think you’re getting the right encouragement or help.’ (Female, 43, youngest child 6, prototype area)

In addition, the lack of clarity exhibited by ‘ineffective’ advisers prompted some of those who had hoped for information and advice to remark that they ‘weren’t much wiser in the end’.

The opinion of those ‘in work on FC’ who had found work prior to coming into contact with the programme or who felt that they had found work without the assistance of the programme offers particular insight into the impact of the adviser on the effect of the programme. On the one hand, there were some in this group who felt that the programme had made a difference to them even though they did not attribute their newly found employment to the programme. These lone parents generally highlighted other effects of the programme, such as confidence building, assistance with FC application and general support or encouragement (which are discussed further below). Usually, these participants had ‘effective’ advisers. On the other hand, there were those who didn’t attribute their employment to the programme who felt that the programme had made no difference to them. Typically, these participants had ‘ineffective’ advisers. Even where such participants had received assistance from the programme with their application for FC, they were quick to point out that such help would have been available through other avenues such as from the BA or an ESJ.

‘I don’t think there is a New Deal actually for me...there’s nothing more there that wasn’t there before, except for, you know, you’ve got a couple of nice ladies down there that will give you a hand with the [FC] forms...I was lucky that I got the job pretty quick, I don’t know whether they would have been that much help if I hadn’t got the job.’ (Female, 40, youngest child 9, prototype area)

Those participants who felt that the programme had made a difference to their lives espoused strongly the benefits of the programme. These were
varied, ranging from those which directly impacted on finding work, to those with potentially more indirect labour market effects:

- **Financial help and reassurance:**
  While there was some criticism of the in-work benefit calculation, discussed in Chapter 6, it was generally felt that it offered the financial reassurance necessary to begin a search for work. In addition, the outcome of the in-work benefit calculation, together with the explanation of the in-work benefits provided by the adviser, were among some of the principal factors that influenced a lone parent’s decision to accept a job offer.
  
  ‘It [NDLP] has made me...have an incentive to go out to work because he [the adviser] has assured me that going to work, even for £3 an hour, which as I say, would be a minimal wage, I could be better off, you know, with Family Credit and still getting benefit on my rent and that...I wouldn’t have gone into such depth of calculations [without NDLP].’ (Female, 41, youngest child 15, prototype area)

  ‘[I am] basically better off financially...you’re not worried...because you’ve got enough money coming in and...because you’ve got the adviser there to give you the best advice...I mean how much would you have to pay a financial adviser for advice like that, you just wouldn’t get it would you? They (advisers) are actually saying, ‘yes, that’ll pay you to do that job, it is worth it’ or ‘if you feel unsure, don’t take it up’.’ (Female, 42, youngest child 14, prototype area)

In addition, as highlighted earlier in this chapter, there was also a view that ‘fast track’ FC ‘took the panic out’ of the transition from IS to FC.

The role ‘effective’ advisers played, as a conduit to the benefits system, was also greatly appreciated by some participants. Effective advisers sometimes highlighted and remedied discrepancies in benefit receipt for lone parents. In addition, they sometimes dealt directly with the Child Support Agency on behalf of lone parents on matters relating to maintenance payment.

- **Building confidence and motivation:**
  There was some feeling that the programme had assisted in building confidence and increasing motivation to find work. Lone parents often spoke of their adviser giving them a ‘push’ or a ‘boost’. This support was especially helpful to those in the ‘looking for work’ stage, where lack of confidence and faith in one’s ability to find work is a key barrier to the labour market. However, it was also the case for those who, once they had found work, needed the confidence to make the transition from IS to FC.
'It's given me more confidence to go back to work...I couldn't have done it on my own, not fill all those forms in and keep trudging up [to the Benefits Agency office], and then being passed from one person to the other...it's like having a fairy godmother if you like. I phone Graham (the adviser) up if I'm stuck and he'll answer a question. I know I've always got a backup to fall back on. He's really good...I think he gave me more confidence. It's not the fact that I'm thick, but he explained it all so I could understand it. Because sometimes I think the social don't explain everything to you. Just 'fill this form in and come back.' (Female, 31, youngest child 6, prototype area)

'It's made me do something...about getting back to work, not just sitting on my backside and just thinking about it, you know, it's just switched a little light on I suppose.' (Female, 35, youngest child 15, prototype area)

**Assistance in finding work:**

As highlighted earlier in this chapter, not all those who are represented in the 'in work' statistics would attribute their employment to participation in the programme. Nevertheless, clearly the programme has sometimes assisted participants in finding work.

'It's made a lot of difference...if I hadn't gone down and had the interview with her, I don't think I would have gone ahead and done it (got a job). I don't think I would have done it off my own back'. (Female, 35, youngest child 5, prototype area)

**Giving practical job search skills:**

Those with little experience in looking for work clearly benefited from the practical job search skills they learned from their adviser. Advisers often recommended avenues for lone parents to explore in their search for work or gave advice and assistance in filling out application forms or preparing CVs. These lone parents had often never had a CV or, if they had, didn't know what details one should contain. Furthermore, advisers sometimes recommended suitable referees for the lone parent to use.

**Alleviating isolation:**

A minority of participants highlighted the ability of the programme to combat their isolation. These lone parents clearly valued being able to discuss their hopes, fears and expectations with the adviser. One participant remarked that participating in the programme 'makes you feel like you're not alone'.
Key findings in Chapter 7

- Following contact with programme, lone parents can be situated along a continuum of distance from or nearness to employment, that is, from being on benefit and not looking for work, to being in work and no longer receiving benefit. This continuum is made up of five stages: ‘on hold’, ‘looking for work’, ‘in work on IS’, ‘in work on FC’ and ‘in work off benefit’.

- The stages are by no means rigid and there is some indication of fluidity between them. Movement along the continuum (and back) is mainly attributable to three central factors - barriers to the labour market, the motivation to work and the effect of the programme.

- There was considerable diversity of opinion among participants about whether the programme had made a difference to their search for work. However, this was directly related to whether the lone parent had an ‘effective’ or ‘ineffective’ adviser.

- Those who felt the programme had made a difference emphasised particular aspects such as the financial help and reassurance given; the role of the programme in building their confidence and motivation to find work; the help given with job search skills or with finding work; and in some cases the ability of the programme to combat isolation.
This chapter attempts to draw out some lessons from the study so far, in relation to factors which influence participation in the New Deal for Lone Parents and implications for good practice. As yet, this is based only on the preliminary results of the evaluation. It can be no more than a postscript to the current report. The main report, in Autumn 1999, will go into more detail.

The lessons are based on the way the programme is perceived by lone parents; on outcomes so far; and the context of lone parents’ lives in terms of motivations and barriers to work.

**8.1 Participation in the programme**

Factors which influence participation in the programme relate to: lone parents’ motivation to work at the time of contact with the programme — in other words, whether or not they are ready, by their own definition, to consider paid employment (Chapter 4); and barriers to the labour market that they may experience over and above motivation (Chapter 5).

*Participants* are more likely to be those with a high degree of work readiness, in the sense of being motivated to work ‘now’ or at least susceptible to considering it as an option. This orientation towards work can relate to the absence of external barriers, though not necessarily so. Some in this group are up against the same problematic practical barriers of non participants, yet their high motivation over-rides, to the extent that they participate in the programme and may progress along the path to paid employment (Chapter 7). Some of the participants however will need intensive help.

Key groups of *non participants* are those who define themselves as:

- **wishing to provide continuous parental care**: those who, due to their feelings about responsibility or duty towards their children, and/or preference, choose to be a full time parent. This decision can be based on a straightforward conviction, as the parent of a child, that this is how their parental role should be. In some cases it is reinforced by necessity, for example where there is:
  - a **child who has special problems or needs**, including emotional, behavioural, or health problems, and by;
  - **lone parenthood**, the need to cope without the support of another parent;
- **affected by the aftermath of relationship breakdown**: those whose current personal situation may be quite unstable, for example due to emotional, financial, or housing issues;
• **having other needs or priorities:** ill health, or other current commitments such as education or training, or a specific up-coming event, such as a wedding or house move;

• **having insuperable practical barriers:** those who perceive other practical barriers to block their participation in the labour market, for example lack of alternative childcare or financial barriers.

Non participants were less likely to be involved in the programme or were ‘on hold’ (Chapter 7) and were less inclined towards paid work. Therefore, at any one time there will be some lone parents for whom the New Deal for Lone Parents is neither timely nor suitable.

8.2 Response to the programme

Lone parents’ initial response to the programme tended to be positive unless there was a fear of a possible element of compulsion to join (a point of some initial confusion for some).

There were diverse views about the effect of the programme.

Most of those who were currently not looking for work had not participated, and felt the programme had made no difference to them. However, some in this group had attended an interview and felt this increased their awareness of the help available should they need it later.

Among participants, views on whether the programme had made a difference to their search for work were directly related to the role of their personal adviser in whether they perceived this person to be ‘effective’ or ‘ineffective’.

Those who felt the programme made a difference emphasised benefits such as: financial help and reassurance; building confidence and motivation; assistance in finding work; practical job search skills, and battling isolation.

8.3 Implications for good practice

At this early stage, two issues stand out:

• **The need for flexibility:**

The keynote of the lone parent population is diversity, not just in profile and background, and in the variety and complexity of the barriers that may be faced, but also in the lone parents’ different positions in relation to employment. The corollary to this diversity is the need for flexibility - in adapting to and catering for these differing needs. This need for flexibility was also a key finding from evaluations of programmes such as JET and GAIN for lone parents in other countries (Chapter 2).
• **The pivotal importance of the adviser:**

As the positive effect of the programme was evident only where the lone parent had an ‘effective’ adviser (Chapter 6), the importance of the adviser is clearly paramount. The mix of characteristics said to be attributed to ‘effective’ advisers underlines the need for skilled individuals to be appointed to this role and the importance of selection and training. Such characteristics may distil down to the ability to tailor an approach that is responsive to an individual parent’s needs, taking account of all the background factors, and at the same time, providing support and understanding to enhance confidence, to raise self esteem and further affect motivation. ‘Ineffective’ advisers were said to be devoid of motivational or confidence building skills, and to give little support or encouragement other than on practical issues.

The significance of the adviser’s role therefore relates to a large extent to the low confidence and lack of self-esteem found among many lone parents, both in general and with regard to work. An ‘effective’ personal adviser provides the potential to address and offer support for this.

8.4 Some lessons to be learned from ‘innovative schemes’ for lone parents

The New Deal for Lone Parents was operating in the prototype areas at the same time as a number of voluntary sector schemes were operating in other areas. These each employed slightly different approaches, yet addressed the same issues as the New Deal for Lone Parents in helping lone parents into work. An evaluation of the innovative schemes\(^\text{33}\) was carried out at the same time as this evaluation of the New Deal in the prototype areas. It found that successful schemes:

• offered a flexible approach, responding to individual diversity;
• depended to a large extent on the role and characteristics of staff/organisers;
• addressed self confidence as an initial and central issue for many of the participants;
• provided links between lone parents, including opportunities for lone parents to meet and/or learn together, as a group;
• fostered links with other agencies to whom lone parents could be referred as needed;
• took a wider or longer term view of positive outcomes, as stepping stones to a more fulfilling job, beyond immediate or short term employment goals.

The New Deal for Lone Parents differs from the voluntary sector innovative schemes in several aspects, including the length of time that advisers are able to spend with participants. Yet the similarity in some of the key ‘lessons for good practice’ is striking.

\(^{33}\) K Woodfield and H Finch (1999).
REFERENCES


DSS Australia (1997b) JET Evaluation Report, Canberra: DSS, DHFS, DEETYA, DFA.


Gardiner K (1997) Bridges from benefit to work, a review, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.


This appendix gives details of the design of the qualitative and quantitative samples, in addition to the recruitment procedures and the methods of data collection and analyses.

**The Survey**

The core sample was designed to be a random sample of lone parents in receipt of Income Support who had received a letter inviting them to participate in the New Deal for Lone Parents. Hence, only lone parents whose youngest child was at least five years old were in scope of this sample. The first part of the sample was targeted on lone parents who were expected to receive a letter within the first few months of the programme’s operation (though the very first group to receive letters was excluded).

The sample was drawn from both the ‘stock’ of existing claimants and the ‘flow’ of new and repeat claims. Programme advisers were instructed to work systematically through the stock on the basis of the 6th digit of lone parents’ National Insurance numbers (NINOs). Letters were dispatched first to those with 6th digit equal to zero, then to those with this digit equal to one and so on, with the aim of contacting the entire stock within one year.

The first part of the core sample was selected from among those whose 6th NINO digit was 1 or 2 (the stock) or who made a new claim between 14 May and 29 July, 1997 (the flow). Individuals were selected randomly from data extracted from the Income Support Computer System (ISCS). The data available at the time of selection was extracted in September and October, 1997. This produces some minor imperfections in the sample, in particular that those lone parents who met the eligibility criteria but who left Income Support before these months could not be included in this sample. This deficiency will be corrected as far as possible in the second round of interviewing in the Autumn of 1998.

Twenty per cent of the eligible stock cases were randomly selected on the basis of three 7th NINO digits; thirty per cent of the flow was randomly selected, again on the basis of the three 7th NINO digits (but, of course, irrespective of the 6th digit). These sampling fractions were increased by 50 per cent for the two areas, Cambridgeshire and Warwickshire, classified as having low unemployment. In total, 1661 people were included in the first part of the core sample.

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1 By this, we mean the digit in the sixth position in the NINO, including the two character prefix.
The differential selection probabilities require that the data be weighted prior to analysis, in order that the results provide unbiased estimates. The weight for each individual is proportional to the reciprocal of her selection probability. Following convention, the weights are scaled so that the weighted sample size is similar to the actual number of interviews.

The survey data presented in this report come solely from the core sample outlined above. However, the evaluation also includes other survey components. A random sample of participants in the programme was interviewed around the same time as the first part of the core sample, to boost the number of participants covered in the survey. These participants, along with those interviewed in the first part of the core sample, were re-interviewed between October 1998 and January 1999.

Interviews were also conducted with a second core random sample drawn from the prototype areas. A second ‘booster’ sample of programme participants was also interviewed at that time. The purpose of these staggered interviews is to identify change in lone parent’s experience of the programme over time.

In addition, interviews were carried out with lone parents in the six control areas. Two samples were drawn in these areas: a matched sample of lone parents similar to those in the core random sample drawn in the prototype areas, and a booster sample of lone parents who had left Income Support. All of these survey data sources will be reported in the final survey report due to be published in Autumn 1999.

Fieldwork Letters were sent by the DSS Social Research Branch to selected lone parents, in order to provide information and re-assurance about the survey, invite participation and ask that any decision not to take part be communicated to the DSS within a two week ‘opt out’ period. Fifteen per cent of the first part of the core sample chose to opt out. This relatively high figure seems to have resulted, in part, from the posting of the first batch of letters in the pre-Christmas period (18% of this batch opted out compared with 13% of those sent letters in January). A copy of the opt out letter is shown in Appendix II.

Fieldwork was conducted using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). A pilot survey of 42 interviews was conducted in November 1997. The survey was launched in mid-December 1997 with personal briefings of all interviewers by members of the SCPR research team. A first batch of the stock sample was available at this time; a second batch comprising both stock and flow cases was issued to interviewers in January 1998.
The average duration of interviews was just under one hour (median of 56 minutes, mean of 59 minutes). However, interview duration depended greatly on participation in the programme, as well as the benefit and labour market characteristics of respondents. A quarter of interviews were completed within 45 minutes, while another quarter took at least 70 minutes.

Response

The response to a survey may be measured in several ways. Primarily, one is concerned with representativeness of the achieved sample in relation to the population of interest. Interviews were achieved with 1097 of the 1661 individuals selected, or 66 per cent of the entire sample.

Table A.1 Survey Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number sampled</td>
<td>1661</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opt-outs (include late opt-outs)</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total issued to interviewers</td>
<td>1405</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address derelict or empty</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ‘deadwood’</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total ‘deadwood’</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent moved, untraceable</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in scope of fieldwork</td>
<td>1313</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not established if lives at address</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contact with respondent</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Refusal</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken appointment, no re-contact</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other unproductive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(inc. respondent away, ill, inadequate English)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unproductive total</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Rate</td>
<td>1097</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighted base for analysis</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Much of the non-response resulted from respondents who opted out or moved address. SCPR interviewers were unable to interview those who opted out or who were not living at the address provided (although where a new address could be obtained, this was followed through). Exclusion of these cases leaves 1313 people 'within scope' of fieldwork. Hence, the total of 1097 interviews represents a fieldwork response rate of 84%. The rate of refusal directly to interviewers was especially low. We are grateful both to respondents and to interviewers for their cooperation and commitment.
The qualitative study

The purpose of qualitative research is to obtain detailed responses, in people’s own words, to explore attitudes, motivations, and decision-making processes in detail. This in-depth approach allows complex and inter-related views to be unpacked and understood within the context of individual experiences and attitudes. It is also used when detail is needed, to describe how people regard a particular issue, to explore experiences they have had, or simply to look at the type of language they use.

Sample selection

Two samples were selected for the qualitative study, both of which were purposively chosen to ensure maximum diversity of lone parent characteristics. The prototype area sample was selected from records obtained from the Lone Parent Adviser database for the 8 prototype areas. Similar to the survey sample, lone parents in this prototype area qualitative sample could have expected to receive a letter from their programme adviser in Autumn 1997. The control area qualitative sample was selected from records obtained from the ISCS.

The key variables for both samples were:
- Age of lone parent.
- Age of youngest child.
- Number of children.
- Type of IS claim (stock or flow).
- Tenure.

In addition, the prototype area sample also included:
- Type of client – targeted & non-targeted ('early starter').
- Case outcome.2

A sample of 254 lone parents was selected from the 8 prototype areas, and 152 lone parents were selected from the 6 control areas. These were sent a letter from the DSS Social Research Branch, which explained the purpose of the research and gave people the opportunity to contact the DSS and opt out of the research. Twenty-seven lone parents from the prototype area and 18 from the control area withdrew at this stage. Copies of approach letters used for the prototype and control sample are shown in Appendix II.

From the numbers remaining, a target sample was identified ensuring that the diversity of the sample was not affected by those who had opted out. These people were approached for interview by SCPR. In all, 48 interviews were conducted in the prototype areas and 30 in the control areas. Of the 48 interviews conducted in the prototype areas, 38 had

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2 Outcome codes were applied by advisers to denote the status of each case. The outcome codes covered in the prototype area sample were 'gaining agreement to find work', 'finding work', 'in work on IS', 'in work off IS', 'completed scheme' and 'pending review'.
participated in the programme to the point of having an interview with an adviser. Eighteen of the forty-eight interviewed were 'early starters', that is, those who opted in to the programme without having received an invitation. A higher proportion of 'early starters' than is representative of the programme as a whole was purposively included in the sample to gather data on this group. A profile of both qualitative samples is included in Chapter 3, along with descriptive measures of the survey sample.

Fieldwork

The interviews were conducted during January and February 1998. All interviews were conducted by members of the research team. Interviews generally lasted for about one to two hours and were interactive and exploratory in form, based on topic guides. These were designed in close collaboration with the DSS. Copies are shown in Appendix II.

All interviews were tape-recorded, with the respondents' permission, and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. Respondents were given a payment of £15, as is usual in this type of research, to acknowledge their time and effort in taking part in the study.

Analysis

The qualitative analysis was undertaken from the verbatim transcriptions using Framework, a qualitative analytic method developed at SCPR. After identification of the key topics and issues emerging from the data, the verbatim material was charted within a thematic matrix. The charts contained a synthesis of the verbatim text, with reference to locations in the transcriptions. Nine subject charts were produced for each of the prototype interviews and seven for each control interview. The charts covered the following topics:

• Knowledge of and approach of the New Deal for Lone Parents.
• Programme interviews (prototype area only).
• Work ambition and strategies for looking for work.
• Education and training issues.
• Benefit receipt and other issues.
• About lone-parenthood.
• Barriers to work.
• Work experience (current and previous).
• Impact of the programme (prototype area only).

From these charts, a detailed within and between case analysis of each interview was carried out from which the report was prepared.
APPENDIX II  FIELDWORK DOCUMENTS

Approach letters (Survey and qualitative study).

Topic guides for qualitative studies.

Outline of survey questionnaire.
SURVEY APPROACH LETTER

A Study of Parents

I am writing to ask for your help in an important study of people who are, or have been, lone parents. The research aims to find out about your experiences of the benefit system and work. Results from the study will be used to plan services for lone parents.

We have commissioned a team of independent researchers from Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR) to carry out this study for us. Your name has been selected at random from our records.

SCPR will be interested in your views, whether you are currently in work or not, and whatever your present circumstances. It is important that they hear about your experiences, even if you have already spoken to someone else. The success of this research depends on your help.

An interviewer from SCPR will visit you sometime after the <DATE>. You may talk to them then, or arrange another time. Don't worry if you are out when the interviewer calls, as they will call back. Anything you discuss with the interviewer will be treated in the strictest confidence and information on your answers will not be passed to the Department of Social Security or anyone else. Interviewers will carry identification.

I do hope you decide to take part in the study. If however you do not wish to take part, please either write to me at the FREEPOST address above or telephone me on 0171 962 8761 before the <DATE>. If you write or phone, please remember to give your name and the reference number at the top of this page. Taking part in this study will not affect any benefit you receive, or any dealings you may have with the DSS.

Thank you for your help. I hope you will be able to take part in this important study and enjoy talking to the interviewer.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Bainbridge
Social Research Branch
A Study of Lone Parents

I am writing to ask for your help with an important study about the attitudes and experiences of lone parents. It aims to find out about lone parents' experiences of the benefit system and opportunities for work, training and education. In particular, we would like to find out how people view the New Deal for Lone Parents which has recently been introduced in your area.

The research is being carried out by a team of researchers from Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR) for the Department of Social Security (DSS). SCPR is an independent social research institute which is entirely separate from the DSS and other Government departments.

Your name has been selected at random from DSS records. SCPR will be contacting you within the next few weeks to arrange a convenient time to talk with you. This interview will last no more than an hour and a half. Your views will be treated in the strictest confidence and no information which could identify you will be passed on to the DSS or anyone else.

I do hope you decide to take part in this study. We are interested in your views whether you are currently involved in the New Deal for Lone Parents or not, and whatever your present circumstances. If however you do not wish to take part, please either write to me at the FREEPOST address above or telephone me on 0171 962 8761 by Monday January 12th, 1998. If you write or phone, please give your name and the reference number at the top of this page. Whether you decide to take part or not, I can assure you this will not affect any benefit you may receive, or any dealings you may have with the DSS.

Thank you for your help. I hope that you will be able to take part in this important study and enjoy talking to the interviewer.

Yours sincerely

Joanne Bainbridge
Social Research Branch
CONTROL AREA QUALITATIVE SAMPLE APPROACH LETTER

A Study of Lone Parents

I am writing to ask for your help with an important study about the attitudes and experiences of lone parents. It aims to find out about lone parents' experiences of the benefit system and opportunities for work, training and education.

The research is being carried out by a team of researchers from Social and Community Planning Research (SCPR) for the Department of Social Security (DSS). SCPR is an independent social research institute which is entirely separate from the DSS and other Government departments.

Your name has been selected at random from DSS records. SCPR will be contacting you within the next few weeks to arrange a convenient time to talk with you. This interview will last no more than an hour and a half. Your views will be treated in the strictest confidence and no information which could identify you will be passed on to the DSS or anyone else.

I do hope you decide to take part in this study. We rely on the voluntary participation of as many different lone parents as possible, which is essential if the research is to give a true picture of lone parents in Britain today. If however you do not wish to take part, please either write to me at the FREEPOST address above or telephone me on 0171 962 8761 by Monday February 6th, 1998. If you write or phone, please give your name and the reference number at the top of this page. Whether you decide to take part or not, I can assure you this will not affect any benefit you may receive, or any dealings you may have with the DSS.

Thank you for your help. I hope that you will be able to take part in this important study and enjoy talking to the interviewer.

Yours sincerely,

Joanne Bainbridge
Social Research Branch
Researcher introduction:
- independent research;
- to assess effect of NDLP – how found it and whether feel it helped or not;
- confidential, and will in no way affect benefits.

Part 1 – Background

Summary background:
- age;
- household composition, age of children;
- tenure;
- disability;
- current activities (e.g. seeking work, in training, in employment);
- caring responsibilities apart from own children.

- how long been a lone parent:
  - whether always been a LP;
  - whether had more than one spell of Lone-Parenthood;
- circumstances surrounding lone parenthood;
- whether anyone else shares upbringing of children:
  - relationship with father(s) of child(ren);
- other children not resident in household;

- awareness of benefit entitlement for LPs;
- when first received benefit;
- which benefit(s) currently receive(s).

Approach of NDLP:
- how first heard of (and when);
- knowledge and awareness of NDLP:
  - assure that ‘as you know there are no plans to make the scheme compulsory’;
  - whether thought the scheme was voluntary;
  - any confusion with other schemes for LPs or with other ‘New Deals’;
- what thought of NDLP when approached:
  - positive reactions (whether thought it relevant to self);
  - potential worries & concerns;
  - reactions of other LPs (whether discussed or taken seriously);
  - general relationship with ES/BA/CSA/DSS etc.;
- initial approach:
  - mode (letter, referral);
  - by whom;
  - recall of content;
  - whether specified appointment;
  - views about;
- what thought of initial approach/how reacted;
  - mode (phone, call-in etc..);
- if no contact made by LP initially;
  - follow up approaches (reminder letters, phone calls etc....).
Where they were at’ before NDLP:
* how felt about being a LP (on benefit/in work/future plans);
  - short-term and long-term ambitions;
* extent to which wanted to work or not
  (why; conditions under which was willing to work):
  - before motherhood;
  - before lone parenthood;
  - after lone parenthood and before NDLP;
* other ambitions.

Seeking work & training before NDLP:
* strategies for pursuing work/training;
  - use of Job Centres & other ES services;
  - recruitment agencies;
  - local media;
  - informal means (through personal contacts and social networks);
  - other avenues;
  - use of voluntary organisations:
    - level of contact with vol. organisations before NDLP;
    - perception of the services they deliver;
* outcome of strategies:
  - why not found work or training;
  - next steps.

Lone parenthood and work before NDLP:
* financial concerns;
  - financial resources at present (benefits, earnings – inc. informal/ exchange, maintenance, tenure, debt);
  - concern about transition from benefit to work;
  - awareness of in work benefits/work incentives;
* child care issues:
  - parenting responsibilities;
  - cost of child care;
  - explore use of different forms of child care (if wouldn’t use, why not?):
    - nurseries, minders, out of school clubs, schemes run by LP;
    - organisations, informal care networks (families & friends);
    - caring for children with health/behavioural problems;
    - care of other dependants (elderly and disabled);
* lack of confidence;
* skills/educational qualifications (inc. vocational qualifications):
  - past educational achievement;
* work experience:
  - employment history (inc. Government programmes); why stopped;
  - temporary/part-time work;
  - voluntary work;
  - undeclared work;
• job opportunities:
  - in general within local labour market;
  - suitability of local jobs for LPs;
  - employer attitudes to LPs;
  - perceptions/expectations of wage levels in the area;
• training & education opportunities locally:
  - other perceived barriers to training & education;
• transport:
  - other mobility barriers;
• health;
• responsibility and rights:
  - views about entitlement of LPs to benefit;
  - as a right (whether working or not);
  - as a support while not in work;
  - as a support whilst in work.

PART II – NDLP process in detail

Throughout Part II explore in what ways LPs current circumstances, barriers and future plans (identified in Part I) have been affected by NDLP.

Initial Interview:
• when - how soon after contact;
• location & proximity of the interview (office, home etc);
• duration;
• initial expectations of interview and of the outcome;
• worries/concerns about the interview;
• explore content of interview, views on all aspects & confidence in info. given:
  - information on NDLP;
  - collection of personal information;
  - aspirations expressed;
  - benefit information;
  - information on work opportunities;
  - discussion of ‘looking for work’;
  - information on training/education opportunities;
  - in work benefit calculation (‘better off’ calculation);
  - child care options and contacts;
  - whether given action pack (response to this);
  - whether given audio cassette (response to this);
• evaluation of adviser;
• outcome of initial interview (what happened next).
Following initial interview…:
- subsequent interviews/contacts:
  - initiated by LP or LPA;
  - same or different adviser;
  - number and nature of contacts;
  - purpose;
  - outcomes;
- extent to which adviser followed up on what they said they would;
- extent to which LP did what they agreed to do;
- referrals to other agencies/organisations;
- aftercare.

Looking for work/training/education:
- strategies used to look for work:
  - steps taken in looking for a job;
  - sources of vacancies;
  - CVs/references;
  - job interviews;
- training and education options explored:
  - provided by;
  - purpose of;
  - as an end or a means to an end;
- successes/problems in looking for work/training/education;

**(If found job through NDLP) experience of working**
- nature of job & how found it:
  - temporary/part-time/full-time;
  - hours worked;
- use of childcare;
- whether better off now & by how much (considering travel to work costs etc..);
- experiences of job so far;
  - training received;
- experience of in work benefits:
  - extended payments of council tax & housing benefit;
  - Income Support;
  - Family Credit;
  - child care disregard;
  - Back to Work Bonus;
  - other benefits;
- views about leaving benefit;
- experience of tax system (esp. emergency tax);
- (if not receiving in work benefits) experience of being off benefit;
- expectations of remaining in current job);
- any job changes planned;
- concerns about not sustaining employment:
  - reasons for this.
Counterfactual assessment:
* whether NDLP has made a difference:
  - explore ways;
* whether would have achieved same outcomes without NDLP.

Suggestions/Improvements/Future:
* views about whole process;
* assure that 'as you know there are no plans to make the scheme compulsory';
* voluntary nature:
  - whether feel it should be made compulsory;
* age limit of children:
  - how feel about including LPs with children under 5 yrs & 3 mths;
* whether NDLP has met their needs;
* advantages/disadvantages;
* whether would encourage other LP’s to get involved;
* other suggested improvements for the national roll out.

Personal future plans & expectations:
* where they plan to go from here.

END
Researcher introduction:
• independent research;
• to assess experiences of employment/training/education;
• to explore perception of barriers to employment/training/education;
• to understand needs of lone parents in accessing work/training/education;
• confidential, and will in no way affect benefits.

Summary background:
• age;
• household composition, age of children;
• educational qualifications;
• tenure;
• disability;
• current activities (e.g. on benefit, seeking work, in training, in employment):
  - (if on benefit) which benefit(s) currently receive(s);
• caring responsibilities apart from own children;

• how long been a lone parent:
  - whether always been a LP;
  - whether had more than one spell of Lone-Parenthood;
• circumstances surrounding lone parenthood;
• whether anyone else shares upbringing of children:
  - relationship with father(s) of child(ren);
• other children not resident in household.

Ambitions:
• how feels about being a LP:
  - on benefit/in work/in education;
• short-term and long-term ambitions;
• extent to which wants to work or not:
  - why;
  - conditions under which would be willing to work);
• changes in feelings about ambitions over time:
  - before motherhood;
  - before lone parenthood;
• reasons for change.

Fulfilling ambitions:
• steps taken in looking for a job:
  - use of Job Centres & other ES services;
  - recruitment agencies;
  - local media;
  - informal means (through personal contacts and social networks);
  - other avenues;
  - use of voluntary organisations:
    - level of contact with vol. organisations before NDLP;
    - perception of the services they deliver;
- sources of vacancies;
- CVs/references;
- job interviews;
- training and education options explored:
  - provided by;
  - purpose of;
  - as an end or a means to an end;
• successes/problems in looking for work/training/education:
• why not found work or training;
• next steps.

Lone parenthood and work:
• financial concerns:
  - financial resources at present (benefits, earnings – inc. informal/exchange, maintenance, tenure, debt);
  - concern about transition from benefit to work;
  - awareness of in work benefits/work incentives;
• child care issues:
  - parenting responsibilities;
  - cost of child care;
  - explore use of different forms of child care (if wouldn’t use, why not?):
    - nurseries, childminders, out of school clubs, schemes run by
      LP organisations, informal care networks (families & friends);
  - caring for children with health/behavioural problems;
  - care of other dependants (elderly and disabled);
• lack of confidence;
• skills/educational qualifications (inc. vocational qualifications):
  - past educational achievement;
• work experience:
  - employment history (inc. Government programmes); why stopped;
  - temporary/part-time work;
  - voluntary work;
  - undeclared work;
• job opportunities:
  - in general within local labour market;
  - suitability of local jobs for LPs;
  - employer attitudes to LPs;
  - perceptions/expectations of wage levels in the area;
• training & education opportunities locally:
  - other perceived barriers to training & education;
• transport:
  - other mobility barriers;
• health.
Awareness of benefits & attitudes towards receipt:

- knowledge and awareness of benefit entitlement for LPs *prompt and check*:
  - Income Support;
  - Family Credit (& child care disregard);
  - extended Housing Benefit & Council Tax payments;
  - Back to Work Bonus;
  - other benefits;
- ever had an ‘in work benefit calculation’ done by the BA/DSS (or anyone else - CAB):
  - whether made any difference;
- experience of claiming different benefits;
- views about entitlement of LPs to benefits:
  - as a right (whether working or not);
  - as a support while not in work;
  - as a support whilst in work;
- advantages and disadvantages of remaining on benefit.

Experience of working (If currently working):

- nature of job(s) & how found:
  - temporary/part-time/full-time;
  - hours worked;
- use of childcare:
- whether better off now than when didn’t work & by how much (considering travel to work costs etc...);
- experiences of job(s):
  - training received;
- experience of in work benefits:
  - extended payments of council tax & housing benefit;
  - Income Support;
  - Family Credit:
    - child care disregard;
  - Back to Work Bonus;
  - other benefits;
- experience of tax system (esp. emergency tax);
- (if still in work) expectations of remaining in current job:
  - any job changes planned;
- concerns about/experience of not sustaining employment;
  - reasons for this.

Services needed for Lone Parents:

- types of help that would be useful in their circumstances *(prompt barriers identified above)*;
- who services are best provided by.

Awareness of NDLP:

- what they know about it:
  - any confusion with other schemes for LPs or with other ‘New Deals’;
• *assure that 'as you know there are no plans to make the scheme compulsory. . . ‘:*
  - age limit of children;
  - voluntary nature:
    - whether they feel it should be made compulsory;
  - what services does NDLP offer;
  - what help a programme like NDLP could offer to them personally
    *(prompt barriers identified above)*;
• advantages/disadvantages of NDLP;
• whether they would get involved;
• whether other LPs they know would get involved.

Personal future plans & expectations:
• where they plan to go from here.
Outline of survey questionnaire

A: Eligibility Check

B: Demographic Information

C: Household Composition, Work History and Benefit History:
   - Household composition.
   - Children outside household.
   - Children's Residence History.
   - Income Support History.
   - Work History.

D: Job Search Activities:
   - Either present or most recent Job Search.

E: Participation in New Deal for Lone Parents:

Participants:
   - Uninvited participation.
   - Version of letter received.
   - Contact with adviser.
   - Action recommended by advisors.
   - Contents of interviews.
   - Better-off Calculations.
   - Knowledge of benefits before and after NDLP.
   - Childcare resources.
   - Evaluation of programme.

Non-participants:
   - Version of letter received.
   - Contact with adviser.
   - Knowledge of benefits.
   - Childcare resources.

F: Job Search Before New Deal for Lone Parents:

Participants:
   - Job Search before 1st interview.
   - Changes in job search strategies.

Non-participants:
   - Changes in job search strategies.

G: Jobs, Education, and Training found since NDLP

H: Leaving Income Support

J: Self-Completion

K: Partnership Information, Income, Housing, and Social Support
Dear

A New Deal for Lone Parents

I am your Personal Adviser for a new service - the New Deal for Lone Parents. I am writing to you as your youngest child is at school. I will offer you help and advice to find a job.

Getting a job really does offer a better future for you and your children, and I am here to help you get one. I will:

♦ Help you through all the steps to finding a job;
♦ Talk to you about current job vacancies;
♦ Help you make arrangements for your children out of school hours and in holidays and half term, and offer help with childcare costs, while you look for work;
♦ Give you advice on benefits, and show you what benefits you can get when you are in a job;
♦ Help you apply for jobs, write a CV, and equip you for interviews;
♦ Give you your own action pack - a guide to looking for work; and
♦ Help you apply for child maintenance, if you do not already get this.

I have enclosed a leaflet with further information.

Please give me a call at the above address. We can arrange to meet at a time to suit you. If this is difficult during the school holidays, I can book an appointment for you when school starts up again.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

Yours sincerely

Lone Parent Adviser
Dear

A New Deal for Lone Parents

I am writing to advise you that an appointment has been made for you at this office on ............... at ................. a.m/p.m..

I am your Personal Adviser for a new service - the New Deal for Lone Parents. I am writing to you as your youngest child is at school. I will offer you help and advice to find a job.

It may be helpful if you could bring with you details:- Housing costs (rent or mortgage), Council tax payments, Maintenance (or other income), Previous jobs that you have had, Childcare arrangements (if any).

Getting a job really does offer a better future for you and your children, I am here to help you get one. I will:

♦ Help you through all the steps to finding a job;
♦ Talk to you about current job vacancies;
♦ Help you make arrangements for your children out of school hours and in holidays and half term, and offer help with childcare costs, while you look for work;
♦ Give you advice on benefits, and show you what benefits you can get when you are in a job;
♦ Help you apply for jobs, write a CV, and equip you for interviews;
♦ Give you your own action pack - a guide to looking for work; and
♦ Help you apply for child maintenance, if you do not already get this.

I have enclosed a leaflet with further information.

If you are unable to keep this appointment then please contact me at the above address.

I look forward to meeting you soon.

Yours sincerely

Lone Parent Adviser
Dear

A New Deal for Lone Parents

As you were unable to make the meeting we had arranged recently, could you please contact me so that we can discuss and arrange another meeting.

Getting a job really does offer a better future for you and your children, and I am here to help you get one. I will, help you in applying for and finding a job, talk to you about job vacancies, help with childcare arrangements and costs, give you advice on benefits and your own action pack, and help you apply for child maintenance, if you do not already get this.

Please give me a call at the above address. We can arrange to meet at a time to suit you.

If however, you have decided not to take up this offer could you please contact me at the above address so that we can understand your concerns.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

Lone Parent Adviser
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Further information regarding the content of the above may be obtained from:

Department of Social Security
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