

Research report

Lone Parent Obligations: supporting the journey into work

by Nick Coleman and Lorraine Lanceley

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 736

Lone Parent Obligations: supporting the journey into work

Nick Coleman and Lorraine Lanceley

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Abbreviations

BOC	Better Off Calculation
ChB	Child Benefit
CTC	Child Tax Credit
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
EZ	Employment Zone
FACS	Families and Children Study
FND	Flexible New Deal
GOR	Government Office Region
IS	Income Support
IWC	In Work Credit
IWEDF	In Work Emergency Discretion Fund
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
JSA(Cont)	Contribution-based Jobseeker's Allowance
JSAg	Jobseeker's Agreement
JSA(IB)	Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
LLSI	Long-standing illness, disability or infirmity that limits activities
LPO	Lone Parent Obligations
LSI	Long-standing illness, disability or infirmity
ND+fLP	New Deal Plus for Lone Parents
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDP	New Deal for Partners
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QWFI	Quarterly Work Focused Interview
SEN	Special Educational Need
WFI	Work Focused Interview
WFIP	Work Focused Interview for Partners
WTC	Working Tax Credit

Glossary of terms

Anticipation effect	Any effects a policy has on individuals' actions (in particular, likelihood to claim benefits) prior to the policy directly affecting them.
Child (for Income Support eligibility)	A person aged under 16 for whom an adult claims Child Benefit (ChB).
Child (for ChB payments)	A person aged up to 16, or up to 20 and in full-time non-advanced education or certain forms of training, for whom ChB can be claimed.
Child Benefit	A universal benefit available to all families with children under the age of 16 or up to 20 if in full-time non-advanced education or certain types of training. The level of payment depends only on the number of children in the family, with a higher payment for the eldest child. It is not income-based.
Child poverty	<p>There is no single, universally accepted definition of poverty. In the United Kingdom, three measures of poverty are used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• absolute low income: this indicator measures whether the poorest families are seeing their income rise in real terms;• relative low income: this measures whether the poorest families are keeping pace with the growth of incomes in the economy as a whole. It measures the number of children living in households below 60 per cent of contemporary median equivalised household income; and• material deprivation and low income combined: this indicator provides a wider measure of people's living standards. The government monitors child poverty against all three measures with a target attached to the relative low-income measure.
Children's centre	Children's centres provide easy access to a range of services, including: integrated early learning and childcare; family support; health services; and advice and information for parents, including signposting to employment and training opportunities.
Child Tax Credit	A payment made by the government for bringing up children. Families with children will normally be eligible if their household income is no greater than £58,000.
Employees	Those who are in employment and paid a wage by an employer for the work that they do.

Employment	The number of people with jobs: people aged 16 or over who do paid work (as employees or the self-employed); those who had a job they are temporarily away from; those on government-supported training and employment; and those doing unpaid family work (working in a family business).
Employment full time	A job of 30 hours or more of work per week.
Employment part time	A job of 16 to 29 hours of work per week.
Employment part time – mini-job	A job of less than 16 hours of work per week.
Employment and Support Allowance	From 27 October 2008, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support (IS) paid on incapacity grounds for new customers. ESA provides financial assistance as well as personalised support for people with limited capability for work to help them move into suitable work.
Employment Zones	Employment Zones (EZ) aimed to help people who had been out of work for a long time to find and stay in work. There were four EZ across the country, in areas that had the highest rate of long-term unemployment. In April 2009, EZ were replaced by the Flexible New Deal (FND) programme in phase 1 districts. FND will be replaced by the Work Programme in summer 2011.
Final year quarterly work focused interview	From November 2008, final year quarterly Work focused Interviews (WFIs) were introduced for lone parents in the last year before their child reached the relevant age where they may lose entitlement to IS under Lone Parent Obligations (LPO). The interviews enable advisers to provide advance notice of the changes and explain the differences in benefits and responsibilities when claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). They also allow advisers to offer an intensified service, helping the customer identify and tackle barriers to work, understand the help available to them from Jobcentre Plus and partner organisations, and move towards work.
Flexible New Deal	FND is a compulsory programme for all those who are unemployed and eligible to receive JSA. Those who have been unemployed and on JSA for 12 months are required to join. The FND programme has four stages. The first three stages relate to claiming JSA with Jobcentre Plus. The fourth stage is an employment programme delivered by a private or third-sector provider. FND will be replaced by the Work Programme in summer 2011.
Formal childcare	Ofsted-registered childcare, including: day nurseries, out-of-school clubs, pre-school play groups and child minders; as well as formal providers not registered by Ofsted: nannies or childcarers in the home, and babysitters.

Income Support	IS is a means-tested benefit for those who do not have to sign-on as unemployed. This includes some lone parents, who are not subject to LPO or are exempt from them.
Informal childcare	Childcare not defined as ‘formal’ (see above), including: friends, neighbours and family members providing childcare.
In Work Credit	In Work Credit (IWC) is a payment of £40 per week (£60 in London) for lone parents who have been receiving out of work benefits for at least 52 weeks, and who are starting a job of at least 16 hours per week.
Jobseeker’s Allowance	JSA is the main benefit for people of working age who are out of work, work less than 16 hours per week on average and are available for and actively seeking work.
Jobseeker’s Agreement	An agreement that sets out the customer’s availability to work and the ways in which they will search for a job. The Jobseeker’s Agreement usually include details on area and hours that customers are available for employment, as well as any restrictions, a description of the type of work that is being sought, and planned action.
Lone parent – generic definition	Parent or guardian who is not in a co-habiting relationship and who has care of a dependent child under 16, or under 18 if in full-time education.
Lone Parent Obligations	Changes to entitlement conditions for lone parents claiming IS, starting from 24 November 2008. Most lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 or over were no longer eligible for IS if they made a new claim for benefit only because they were a lone parent, subject to certain exemptions and conditions. Instead those able to work could claim JSA and were expected to look for suitable work in return for personalised help and support. Lone parents with limited capability for work could claim ESA. The change has been introduced in three phases: a youngest child aged 12 or over from 24 November 2008; a youngest child aged ten or over from 26 October 2009; and a youngest child aged seven or over from 25 October 2010. Existing lone parent’s entitlement to IS is also phased in line with the above timescales.
LPO flexibilities	Additional flexibilities have been incorporated in the JSA regime for parents (all parents not just lone parents). These are available to those with caring responsibilities for a child or children. These flexibilities include the hours that parents are available to work and whether appropriate/affordable childcare is available. Other flexibilities involve Jobcentre Plus staff following up parents if they fail to attend interviews before benefit entitlement becomes affected.

New Deal for Lone Parents	New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) was launched nationally in October 1998. NDLP is a voluntary programme that aims to help and encourage lone parents to improve their job readiness and employment opportunities, and gain independence through working. This is achieved through providing access to various elements of provision made available through a personal adviser. Eligibility for NDLP includes all lone parents aged 16 or over whose youngest child is aged below 16, and those who are not working or are working less than 16 hours per week.
New Deal Plus for Lone Parents	This has been delivered through a number of pilot areas since April 2005. The pilots test the delivery of an ‘enhanced’ package of support for lone parents and couple parents (key elements of the pilots were extended to couple parents in April 2008) to increase the number of parents finding and remaining in work through increasing NDLP/New Deal for Partners participation and outcome rates. Some elements tested in the earlier phase of the pilots have been rolled out nationally, including IWC and Childcare Assist. For lone parents, the in work advisory support and in work emergency discretion fund elements have also been rolled out, and these are available to couple parents in the pilot areas. This adds an additional range of support to existing NDLP provision. NDLP ended in July 2010.
Options and Choices Events	These are group sessions organised for lone parents moving from IS to JSA as a result of LPO. Their purpose was to inform lone parents about the changes to IS entitlement and to raise awareness of the support available to help them develop skills and gain a better understanding of the labour market. They were a national requirement prior to September 2010 but are now discretionary.
Sanction	This is a penalty imposed by a decision maker. It is the removal of all or a proportion of benefit payment due to a customer’s non-compliance with conditions placed on benefit receipt.
Self-employed	Those who work on their own account, whether or not they have employees, in their main job.
Sustained employment	Sustained employment is defined as a job that involves a minimum of 16 hours per week, where the customer is in employment for at least 26 weeks out of 30. Breaks in employment must total no more than four weeks and the job must start before completing the allotted time with the provider or within six weeks of completing the allotted time.

Unemployed	Unemployed people are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• those who are without a job, want a job and have actively sought work in the past four weeks, and are available to start work in the next two weeks;• those out of work, have found a job and are waiting to start in the next two weeks.
Universal Credit	In an effort to simplify the benefit system and improve work incentives, Universal Credit is set to replace the present benefit structure. A new law will need to be passed first, after which changes would take effect from 2013. Universal Credit will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment.
Work Focused Interview	As a way of engaging with lone parents on benefits, it became a requirement from April 2001 to participate in lone parent WFIs as part of making a claim for IS. The WFI involves a face-to-face interview with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. The aim is to encourage and assist customers to address barriers to work and move towards sustainable employment, through accessing a range of support options. Lone parents entitled to IS take part in mandatory lone parent WFIs every six months, until the year before their IS eligibility is due to end (based on the age of their youngest child) when they become quarterly (i.e. every three months).
Work Programme	By summer 2011 the existing welfare to work provision, including FND and Pathways to Work, will be replaced by a single integrated Work Programme. The Work Programme will assume the task of supporting workless lone parents into employment, alongside other workless people, using an outcome-based, staged entry point model.
Working Tax Credit	Working Tax Credit (WTC) provides financial support on top of earnings. This is payable on top of ChB. Child support maintenance is wholly disregarded when calculating WTC.

Summary

Introduction

Changes to the benefits system for lone parents have been introduced in recent years with an increasing focus on work preparation and obligations to look for work. As part of the Lone Parent Obligation (LPO) changes, from November 2008 lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 or over were no longer entitled to receive Income Support (IS) solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. Since then, the age of the youngest child has reduced to ten and over from October 2009, and to seven and over from October 2010.¹ Lone parents who are no longer eligible for IS have been able to move to other benefits as appropriate, including Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The JSA regime has been amended to include flexibilities for parents, for example, in the hours of work they are required to seek.

The survey described in this report is one element of a wider evaluation, whose aim is to explore whether and how lone parent employment interventions provide an effective incentive to look for paid employment, alongside an effective package of support for workless lone parents, to enable them to find, enter and sustain paid employment.

The findings presented here are based on a national, quantitative survey of the DWP's lone parent customers. The findings focus on the characteristics, circumstances and attitudes of lone parents whose youngest child was approaching the LPO threshold of seven or eight. In total, 2,779 interviews were conducted in respondents' homes between May and August 2010.

The interviews on which the findings in this report are based were conducted soon after the change in government in May 2010 and were not directly affected by resulting policy changes. However, the findings are relevant to, and can help inform, the further roll-out of LPO to lone parent customers with a youngest child aged five, due to be implemented by the new government. The findings are also of relevance to the coalition government's approach to the design and timing of eligibility for the new Work Programme for lone parents, its future approach to work incentives, and making work pay for those receiving benefits.

Lone parent and household characteristics

The lone parents in the survey were sampled on the basis that they were in the final year of their eligibility for IS, with their youngest child approaching the age of seven or eight. In fact, 12 per cent said their youngest child was under the age of six at the time of the survey, and so below the age of the youngest child known to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and these respondents would therefore be able to continue claiming IS. This finding may help to inform future projections of the numbers who will be affected by LPO.

¹ In May 2010 a coalition government was formed between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, following a general election. The new coalition UK Government has outlined its plans to extend the scope of conditionality for lone parents on benefits. Under measures announced in the June 2010 Emergency Budget, lone parents will lose their eligibility to IS when their youngest child reaches five.

Despite (mostly) having a youngest child of a similar age, there was considerable diversity in terms of characteristics and circumstances. It is important to understand the diverse characteristics of these lone parents in relation to future service delivery. This will provide pointers as to how the benefit regime needs to accommodate different lone parent customers when their IS eligibility ends.

Firstly, there was a range in terms of number of children, from just one (33 per cent) to four or more (11 per cent). Those lone parents with just one child were younger (sometimes under 25), while those with four or more children were much older (45 or over in some cases). Overall, 12 per cent of households contained another adult (in addition to the lone parent), including ‘adult’ children (six per cent), a new partner (two per cent) or parents (three per cent). One in three ‘other adults’ (32 per cent) were in work at the time of the survey. Overall, the analysis indicates that the presence of other adults in the household can affect lone parents in different ways: while some were in work and/or also helped with childcare, in other cases they represented an additional caring responsibility for the respondent.

The survey explored a number of characteristics that have been found in previous research to be linked to worklessness or greater distance from the labour market. Analysis of the lone parent population and the population of mothers with partners (using data from the Families and Children Study (FACS) 2008) shows that the sample of lone parents affected by LPO (in this survey) was more likely to have many of these characteristics. A typical pattern was for the incidence of these characteristics to be highest among lone parents affected by LPO, then lower among lone parents in the population, and lower still among mothers with partners. For example, 31 per cent of respondents in this survey had no formal qualifications; this compared with 15 per cent of lone parents in the population, and three per cent of mothers with partners in the population. Lone parents in this survey were most distinctive – that is, showed the greatest difference in comparison with other lone parents and mothers with partners in the population – in relation to worse self-reported health; lower income and greater financial-related problems; lower qualifications; lower vehicle access; and higher levels of social renting.

Specifically, 19 per cent said their health was not good over the past 12 months, and 28 per cent reported a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI), including 12 per cent with a mental health problem. Analysis of administrative data indicates that incidence of LSI is higher for those in earlier roll-out groups with older children, and is therefore a significant issue for the full group of lone parents affected by LPO.

Perceived financial problems were quite common. Around two in five (43 per cent) said that they found it very or quite difficult to manage financially, and one in four said they had trouble with debts nearly all the time (24 per cent). At the time of the survey, only a small proportion of respondents were in work (as discussed below), but the survey findings suggested that financial problems decreased when lone parents moved into work (although debt problems could be greater in the transition to work), whereas household income only increased when respondents moved into work of 16 hours or more per week. This reflects the weak financial incentives for those working less than 16 hours per week.

There was also evidence of multiple types of need or disadvantage. For example, respondents with a LSI were more likely to have caring responsibilities and to report literacy or numeracy problems. They were also more likely to have a child with a LSI (overall, 30 per cent of lone parents had a child with a LSI). These respondents were also more likely than other lone parents to experience financial difficulties. Similarly, the proportion that did not have any formal qualifications was higher for a number of sub-groups, including: those with more children; those with longer IS claims; those without vehicle access; and those whose first language was not English.

This analysis indicates that some lone parents in the survey are likely to experience particular difficulties in trying to move into work. At the same time, the various characteristics related to worklessness were also widespread, as most respondents had at least some of these characteristics. It is, however, important to bear in mind that the issues faced by lone parents were generally seen as restricting the type or amount of work they could do, rather than preventing it altogether (at least in the longer term). This reflects the high proportion of respondents who said they wanted to, and expected to, work in the future (see below).

Working background and current employment

The work history of lone parents in this survey was varied. Ten per cent of lone parents were in work (ranging from mini-jobs to full-time employment) at the time of the survey, while 37 per cent were not in work but had worked since they first became a parent. However, 28 per cent had not worked since they became a parent (at least six years previously), and a further one in four (24 per cent) had never worked. Overall, this confirms that many of the lone parents in the survey had not worked for a considerable period of time, and some had not worked at all.

The main reasons given for leaving their last job by those no longer in work were varied but were mostly 'personal'. Specifically, one in three (32 per cent) left their last job because they were pregnant. Job-related reasons, such as redundancy or the end of a fixed term or temporary job, were given by 20 per cent of respondents. Eight per cent of respondents cited problems with childcare as the main reason for leaving their last job.

Lone parents included in the survey were all receiving IS in April 2010, between two and five months before they were interviewed. At the time of the interview, nearly all (94 per cent) were still receiving IS, although three per cent had moved off IS and into work, and two per cent had re-partnered.

In addition to the three per cent who had moved off IS into work, seven per cent of respondents were working (less than 16 hours per week) while claiming IS (giving the total of ten per cent in work at time of survey). The two main triggers for moving into work were finding a suitable job opportunity, and finding work that allowed them to combine work and children.

Lone parents who were working while claiming IS had often been in work for some time (55 per cent more than a year) and tended to work a small number of hours (84 per cent were working no more than ten hours per week).

The work that lone parents were doing at the time of the survey, or had done previously, was generally part-time, low-skilled work. Respondents were more likely to be in low-skilled jobs (elementary and personal service occupations), compared with the female working population.

The majority of working respondents were satisfied with their job (87 per cent) and found it convenient for their home and family life (84 per cent). However, one in four (23 per cent) said that their job prevented them from giving the time they want to their children (at least some of the time), and this was higher (42 per cent) among those working 16 or more hours per week.

The survey asked about family-friendly and flexible working conditions, and indicates a mixed picture. Some respondents said that their employer offered time off when their child was ill (19 per cent paid and 28 per cent unpaid). However, a lack of family-friendly employers was seen as a barrier to work, along with pressure to work longer hours or overtime among some of those in work.

Childcare

Childcare was used both by respondents who did and didn't work. Overall, around two in five lone parents said they currently used childcare of some kind (42 per cent). Those who were currently working but not using childcare mostly said that they only worked during school hours. Where lone parents were not in work, use of childcare was higher among those who were closer to the labour market, in terms of qualifications and recent work experience.

As expected, use of childcare increased with hours worked: from 39 per cent among those not in work to 59 per cent among those working less than 16 hours per week, and 87 per cent of those working 16 hours or more per week.

In order for lone parents to move into work, it is possible that they will need to consider using formal childcare. Overall, lone parents in this survey, most of whom were not working, were more likely to use informal rather than formal childcare (36 per cent compared with 16 per cent). Grandparents were the most frequently used type of childcare, with ex-partners, other relatives and friends/neighbours the other main types of informal childcare. Breakfast or after-school clubs on school sites were by far the most commonly used type of formal childcare. This reflects the age profile of children covered by the survey – predominantly primary-school-age children, with very few pre-school children.

Working and non-working respondents tended to use the same types of childcare (when they used childcare at all). The main exception was the greater reliance on the ex-partner among lone parents in work. The survey showed that ex-partners provide a much greater number of hours of childcare than other people/providers, and therefore may play an enabling role for lone parents when they are working.

Use of formal childcare was higher among those working 16 hours or more per week (34 per cent), compared with those working less than 16 hours or not working at all (16 per cent and 14 per cent respectively). The limited use of formal childcare among those working less than 16 hours per week reflects the high proportion working a very small number of hours and during school hours only (71 per cent worked only during school hours).

More than half (57 per cent) of those using formal childcare had paid for at least part of it (this proportion is in line with the wider lone parent population). Payment for informal childcare was unusual (five per cent), although around half (47 per cent) of those using informal childcare said they did something in return for at least part of the childcare they received. This was most common when respondents had help with childcare from friends and neighbours, suggesting that reciprocal arrangements with friends and neighbours form an important part of the overall childcare package for many lone parents in the survey.

The use of childcare in this survey was compared with the wider lone parent population, as well as with the population of parents in couples. This confirmed the extensive use of informal childcare among lone parents. These comparisons also showed that the use of formal childcare was broadly similar between lone parents in this survey and the wider population (of both lone parents and parents in couples).

For lone parents at this stage of the LPO journey there were mixed views on local childcare. These questions were asked of all respondents: both those who had and hadn't used formal childcare. Respondents were more likely to say that the quality of childcare in their area was good rather than poor (41 per cent compared with 16 per cent). However, lone parents were more likely to say there was not enough formal childcare locally rather than say there was the right amount (36 per cent compared with 28 per cent). Around one in three (36 per cent) felt that the affordability of local

childcare was poor, while 19 per cent said that it was good. Attitudes to formal childcare tended to be more positive among those in work and those with current or previous experience of using formal childcare (in relation to quality and affordability, if not availability), but less positive among those with a child with a LSI and in rural areas.

A minority of lone parents had experienced difficulties with childcare in the past. Of the 47 per cent of respondents who had worked since the birth of their oldest child, ten per cent said that it was very difficult for them to stay in the job because of childcare arrangements breaking down.

Findings on use of childcare can be considered alongside lone parents' attitudes to work and employment constraints, to assess lone parents' preferences regarding childcare. This can identify three broad groups. Firstly, there is a group of lone parents who didn't use childcare at all and were committed to looking after their children themselves. In general, the survey showed a strong 'parental childcare' focus across the sample as a whole; for example, the majority of respondents (71 per cent) agreed that 'it's always better if the parent can look after the child themselves'. This 'parental childcare' focus was particularly strong for lone parents who were not currently using childcare: they were more likely than other respondents to agree that 'my job is to look after the home and family', and were also less likely to agree that 'children benefit from being looked after by other people'.

Secondly, there is a group that used informal childcare but was reluctant to use formal childcare. Among those using informal childcare only (27 per cent of the total sample), 40 per cent said that they were only prepared to leave their children with family or close friends, and described this as a big barrier to work.

The third group covers those who used or would consider using formal childcare. One in six (16 per cent) used formal childcare of some kind, and the survey indicated that use of formal childcare might be increased: 48 per cent of those not currently using childcare thought they would use after-school or holiday clubs when they moved into work. This suggests that, despite a reluctance among some respondents to use formal childcare (as noted above), there may be scope for encouraging more lone parents to use this type of childcare in the future, particularly if awareness or availability can be increased. At present, two in three non-users of breakfast or after-school clubs were aware of them (66 per cent), and just 21 per cent of non-users of holiday clubs were aware of this type of childcare being available in their area.

The survey also explored lone parents' recollections of discussions they had had about childcare at Jobcentre Plus. Around one in six lone parents who had been in contact with Jobcentre Plus in the last year said they had received advice or help with finding out about local childcare (18 per cent).

Attitudes and constraints

Lone parents were very employment focused. The majority of lone parents (78 per cent) reported wanting to work and 69 per cent thought they would work in the next few years. When asked about their attitudes to work, parenting and childcare, there were high levels of agreement to pro-work attitude statements. In particular, respondents who had claimed benefits for less than one year and those looking for work were more likely to have employment-focused attitudes and attitudes reflecting a motivation to balance work and parenting responsibilities. Overall, respondents in this survey were more employment focused than the wider population of lone parents (in FACS 2008 data).

Respondents reported multiple barriers to employment, with 98 per cent of those not in work reporting two or more barriers to employment. This was in line with the wider population of lone

parents (FACS 2008). The most frequently cited barrier to employment was the need for a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their child/ren (64 per cent of respondents reported this as a big barrier to employment, with a further 24 per cent reporting it as a small barrier). Some groups of respondents were more likely to perceive issues as barriers to employment than others. For example, childcare-related constraints were more likely to be reported as barriers to employment by respondents with a child with a disability, those living in rural areas, those with a disability and those with financial problems. Once in work the factors that affect lone parents' ability to stay in work were not the same as those reported as barriers to entering employment. In particular, concern over not being financially better off in work, unanticipated in-work costs and childcare concerns were the most commonly cited big barriers affecting lone parents in work.

Relationship with Jobcentre Plus

Nearly all respondents (92 per cent) said they had been in contact with Jobcentre Plus over the previous 12 months². Frequency of contact reflected the recent move of this cohort from six-monthly to quarterly WFIs. Two in three (66 per cent) recalled receiving a better off calculation (BOC). One in ten lone parents recalled being on New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) at some point, and of these, 24 per cent had been referred to a careers adviser in the previous 12 months, while 27 per cent had been referred to an external provider.

Where lone parents had been looking for work in the previous 12 months, they gave differing views on the support they had received to find work. One in three said they had received a lot of encouragement to find a suitable job (31 per cent), but similar proportions said they had received 'some' (38 per cent) or 'little or no' encouragement (31 per cent). While 17 per cent said that Jobcentre Plus staff had advised them to hold out for a better job, 11 per cent said they were told to take the first job that came along (the remainder said they had not received advice of this nature).

Around two in five lone parents (43 per cent) said that there was a particular person at Jobcentre Plus that they tried to speak to. Where this was the case, most respondents said that this person had made a lot of effort (56 per cent) or some effort (32 per cent) to get to know them. Most respondents also said that this person gave them the support they needed (82 per cent). Overall, however, 27 per cent did not think that their individual circumstances had been taken into account in the advice they had received at Jobcentre Plus, and one in five (21 per cent) said they would have liked more time with Jobcentre Plus staff or advisers. Therefore, the findings as a whole give a mixed picture of the level of individual, personalised support provided to lone parents in the period before their entitlement to IS ends.

The majority of lone parents said that, overall, the advice they had received from Jobcentre Plus in the previous 12 months had been helpful (83 per cent), while 69 per cent said that they were satisfied with the overall service provided by Jobcentre Plus. When asked for their overall perceptions of the IS regime, respondents were more likely to agree than disagree that Jobcentre Plus understands their needs, and that they received the right amount of support on IS. Views were divided as to whether people on IS are pushed into things they don't want to do (approximately equal numbers agreed as disagreed).

² The eight per cent of lone parents who said they had had no contact with Jobcentre Plus may have had contact with other brokers or advisors working on behalf of Jobcentre Plus, for example, via Employment Zones. Others may have accessed support via children's centres without being aware that the adviser worked for Jobcentre Plus. Others may have received deferrals or waivers.

On the various questions asking about attitudes to Jobcentre Plus, lone parents tended to be more positive if they had experience of NDLP or had been in recent contact. Respondents were less positive if they reported financial problems, or if they had a limiting illness or disability (LLSI), especially if they had both a mental health and physical problem.

One in eight lone parents (13 per cent) said that their benefits had been reduced (eight per cent) or stopped (five per cent) by Jobcentre Plus as a result of a missed appointment in the previous 12 months.

Work aspirations and the future

As well as the ten per cent of lone parents who were in work at the time of the survey (as noted above), 38 per cent of respondents were looking for work. Those who were looking for work tended to have had recent work experience. However, a number of groups were less likely to be in work or to be looking for work: those with a LLSI, those with no formal qualifications, and those with more children.

Most respondents who were not looking for work thought that they would do so in the future, although the timescale varied from the next few months (30 per cent) to a year or two (30 per cent), while others (40 per cent) were not sure when they would look for work. Overall, nine per cent did not expect to look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) at all in the future, and 40 per cent of the total sample did not expect to look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) for at least a year or so, which would be after the time their eligibility for IS was due to end and they would (typically) need to start claiming JSA.

These findings confirm that lone parents affected by LPO vary considerably in terms of their distance from the labour market, and future support for these lone parents (in Quarterly Work Focused Interviews and on JSA) will need to reflect these variations.

The survey examined the work preferences of those looking for work, or expecting to do so at a specified time in the future. Most wanted to work 16-29 hours per week, and 45 per cent specified exactly 16 hours (this is likely to reflect the financial incentives in the current benefit system). However, respondents were also likely to say that, in principle, they would accept a job with more hours than they preferred (57 per cent said they would accept work of 30 hours or more per week). In addition, one in three respondents (33 per cent) said that they would be prepared to travel for at least an hour (one way) for work, and one in four (25 per cent) said that they would be prepared to move for a job.

At the same time, only a minority of respondents said that they would be prepared to work before or after school hours (20 per cent), and only half (47 per cent) said they would work outside of school holidays. This indicates that, despite a willingness to work longer hours in principle, most lone parents in the survey would prefer to work during school hours, and, in some cases, during school term-time only.

Lone parents who had looked for a job in the previous 12 months showed relatively low levels of jobsearch intensity. Less than half of these respondents (44 per cent) had actually applied for a job in the previous 12 months, and of these around half (48 per cent) had been for a job interview. This was most likely to have been just one job interview (55 per cent), while 11 per cent had been to five or more.

Three in ten lone parents (29 per cent) had taken training or education classes in the previous 12 months, to improve skills, help them to do a job or find employment. Of these, one in five (21 per

cent) said that Jobcentre Plus staff had arranged the course (or at least one of the courses they had attended). Lone parents on NDLP may be entitled to financial support to pay for childcare, and in total 22 per cent of those who had been on training in the previous 12 months had used formal childcare of some kind.

Implications for the future

There are a number of key implications from this research for the future; specifically, in relation to lone parents' future movement into work; the implications for support for these lone parents under JSA; the future roll-out of LPO; and the introduction of Universal Credit.

The lone parents in this survey are likely to be competing for a limited number of part-time jobs. A proportion will be in a good position to compete for these jobs, notably those with higher qualifications and with current and recent work experience. However, these are a minority; more typical are the lone parents with little recent work experience, low skills and other barriers to work. In addition, work options are likely to be limited by a strong preference for part-time work that fits in with school hours (and sometimes school holidays). This has a number of implications for the service provided by Jobcentre Plus:

- For those looking for work, the JSA regime should serve to increase jobsearch intensity, one of the issues noted in this survey for this group of lone parents which may be slowing their movement into work. In particular, it will be important to increase awareness of jobs that match lone parents' preferences, where they are available. In addition, Jobcentre Plus staff may be able to broaden customers' perspectives on the range of jobs that may be appropriate or feasible. The survey also indicated that flexible and family-friendly arrangements can be limited. This suggests that DWP and Jobcentre Plus need to continue to work with local employers to promote family-friendly workplaces.
- For those further from the labour market, survey findings suggest that training may be an important option, both to address the lack of skills and qualifications among many lone parents, and, where possible, to encourage the use of formal childcare, which can be available free to lone parents undertaking some types of training. At the same time it is important to recognise that many of the lone parents had not worked for a considerable amount of time, and so some work experience, including voluntary work, may be beneficial.

More generally, the JSA regime and Work Programme will need to address low motivation and commitment among those further from the labour market. These respondents often feel committed to looking after their children, and (at this time) do not see work as an option for them. They also face other barriers to work such as low skills and lack of previous work experience. This group is likely to represent the greatest challenge to the JSA regime in the future.

Overall, the survey has highlighted the diverse and complex needs and barriers of this group of lone parents. Thus, a key aspect of service delivery for all lone parent customers will be the level of personalised support.

Projections of the numbers affected by LPO and their destinations will need to accommodate lone parents who are exempt through having younger children. In this survey, 12 per cent of respondents were found to have children aged under six and would therefore not end IS eligibility when scheduled. This issue is likely to feature even more prominently in the future when LPO is rolled out to lone parents with a youngest child aged five or six as they are more likely to go on to have additional children.

In an effort to simplify the benefit system and improve work incentives, Universal Credit is set to replace the present benefit structure. A key aim of Universal Credit will be to '*ensure that work always pays and is seen to pay*' (DWP, 2010). This would directly address one of the main perceived barriers to work among lone parents in this survey: the perception that 'I am not sure I would be financially better off in work'. However, although not being sure of being better off in work is one of the largest barriers to work among this group of lone parents, it is just one of many barriers identified in this survey. Given the importance of balancing work and family, this suggests that lone parents will often need encouragement and support to start work of 16 hours or more per week, and to stay in that work.

1 Introduction

This chapter presents the background to the research, an overview of the evaluation aims and methodological approach, and details of the report structure.

1.1 Background and policy context

1.1.1 Lone parents in the United Kingdom

There are an estimated 1.8 million lone parents in Britain today caring for three million children. Lone parents now make up one-quarter of all families, and the United Kingdom (UK) has proportionately more lone parents than most Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development countries. The median age for a lone parent is 36 and two per cent of lone mothers are teenagers. Thirteen per cent of lone parents come from black or minority ethnic communities and around ten per cent of lone parents are fathers (One Parent Families, 2008).

The social composition of lone parent families has changed over the past 30 years. Hasluck and Green (2007) noted a diversity of circumstances among lone parents (including those who had never had a permanent partner and those who were separated, divorced or widowed), as well as differences in the age and number of children. These changes are the consequence of a number of factors, including a trend for people to marry less frequently and later in life, and an increase in the rate of divorce and in births outside marriage. Being a lone parent is often a transition stage. Marsh and Vegeris' (2004) analysis of a ten-year study of lone parents found a prevalence of re-partnering over time (a high proportion of which resulted in marriage).

1.1.2 Lone parents and employment

The employment rate for lone parents is currently 57 per cent. This rate has been increasing steadily over the years due to a combination of policy initiatives, changes in characteristics of lone parents over time and improvements in employment rates across the board. There is, however, a group of lone parents who claim benefits for long periods of time. Marsh and Vegeris (2004) reported that just over one-third of lone parents (36 per cent) remained on Income Support (IS) for the ten years covered by their longitudinal research (1991–2001). For those lone parents who move into work, retention is key. Evans *et al.* (2004) noted the prevalence of cycling between work and benefits among lone parents, with lone parents twice as likely as other groups to leave employment.

1.1.3 Child poverty in lone parent households

Children of lone parents are more likely to live in poverty than children in a two parent family. Recent analysis of the Families and Children Study (FACS) by Barnes *et al.* (2008) showed that 63 per cent of non-working lone parent families experienced financial hardship, compared with 52 per cent of non-working coupled families. In-work lone parents were also found to be more likely to experience financial hardship than in-work coupled parents (24 and 13 per cent respectively). The same analysis showed that one year after moving into work, 70 per cent of families (both lone parent and coupled families) had moved out of income poverty.

Increasing parental employment is one of the key means of reducing poverty. A series of welfare-to-work policies and programmes have been implemented over recent years to increase parental employment. Specific measures include: the introduction of mandatory Work focused Interviews (WFIs) for lone parents claiming IS; New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) to support the transition from

benefits to work; changes to the tax and benefits system, to support work and help make it pay; and Lone Parent Obligations (LPO).

1.1.4 Lone Parent Obligations

LPO was introduced from November 2008 and meant that lone parent customers with a youngest child aged 12 or over would no longer be entitled to IS solely on the grounds of being a lone parent and that, by autumn 2010, those with a youngest child aged seven and over would lose entitlement. Following an announcement by the new coalition government in the June 2010 Emergency Budget and subject to passage of the Welfare Reform Bill in 2011, these obligations will be extended so that lone parents will lose their eligibility to IS when their youngest child reaches five.

Those able to work will instead be eligible to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and will be required to be available for and actively seeking employment. New 'parent flexibilities' have been inserted into the JSA regulations. These apply to both lone parents and dependent partners of main claimants who are parents, to recognise their responsibility to care for a dependent child. Alternatively, lone parents with health problems or disabilities may, if eligible, claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). ESA is a way of helping people with an illness or disability move into work rather than stay on benefits and, from 27 October 2008, ESA has applied to new customers, replacing Incapacity Benefit and IS with disability premium (that is, IS paid on incapacity grounds).

Some lone parent customers who have another reason for being entitled to IS, such as receipt of Carer's Allowance or foster caring, are exempt from LPO and will continue to be eligible to claim IS. In addition, some groups of lone parent customers are offered transitional protection and are entitled to continue to receive IS for a limited period of time. These groups include: lone parents on IS who are in full-time study, on a full-time course, or on an approved training scheme. This transitional protection will only apply to the course of study or training that the lone parent is undertaking at the point the IS entitlement changes come into force. Transitional protection will apply until the end of the course or the date the child reaches the relevant age in force at the start of the course, whichever comes first.

The LPO changes are being implemented for both existing and new lone parent customers. They were anticipated to affect around 300,000 existing lone parent customers (those with a youngest child aged seven or over) who claim IS because they are lone parents. It is estimated that a further 100,000 lone parents will be affected when the age is reduced to five, following the transfer of those currently claiming IS. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) administrative data show that, during phase 1 of the roll-out of LPO (affecting lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 to 15), 107,000 lone parents would potentially have their IS eligibility removed (Casebourne et al., 2010).

The process for ending IS commences approximately 12 months before a customer's entitlement to IS is expected to end. At this stage a lone parent customer is brought into the final year Quarterly Work Focused Interviews regime, which helps prepare them for the changes. Eight weeks before their IS entitlement is due to end, the lone parent customer will receive a letter from Jobcentre Plus which lets them know when their last payment is due and invites them to a voluntary interview six weeks before the end of their eligibility. During the interview the adviser will discuss the LPO changes with the customer, how they will affect them and offer a range of support. Four weeks before IS is due to end, the lone parent customer will receive a letter from the Benefit Delivery Centre informing them of this. If the lone parent has not attended their voluntary interview at the six-week stage they will be invited to a second interview. If the lone parent does not attend the second interview they will be sent a further letter explaining the need for them to make contact. If there has been no contact with the Jobcentre Plus office in the previous three months, for example, at an Options and Choices Event, WFI or case-load interview, then a home visit may be considered. Five days before IS is due to end, the lone parent will receive a formal decision letter stating that their IS is ending.

1.1.5 Other contextual changes

Economic recession

The introduction of LPO in November 2008 was against a backdrop of recession. From the second quarter of 2008, the recession was beginning to have an impact on the UK labour market, with an increasing claimant count, falling vacancy levels and increasing redundancy levels (Office for National Statistics, 2009).

In response to the recession, additional front-line advisers and other staff were recruited to Jobcentre Plus offices to help deal with the increased JSA register size and corresponding footfall. Some of this included extra resource to deal specifically with LPO. Jobcentre Plus are currently working on the additional staffing levels required for when LPO is extended in 2012 to lone parents with a youngest child of five.

Change of government

In May 2010 a coalition government was formed between the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, following a general election. The new coalition UK Government has outlined its plans to extend the scope of conditionality for lone parents on benefits. Under measures announced in the June 2010 Emergency Budget and subject to passage of the Welfare Reform Bill in 2011, lone parents will lose their eligibility to IS when their youngest child reaches five. The government estimates that this could move 20,000 to 25,000 lone parents into employment, and argues that such labour market activation policies, alongside in-work financial support, will help reduce child poverty (DWP, 2010b). The budget measures represent an extension of LPO introduced by the previous administration.

The change of government will also see wider changes to the JSA regime which will affect all claimants including lone parents. By summer 2011 the existing welfare to work provision, including Flexible New Deal and Pathways to Work, will be replaced by a single integrated Work Programme. The Work Programme will assume the task of supporting workless lone parents into employment, alongside other workless people, using an outcome-based, staged entry point model. In November 2010, DWP also published a White Paper: *Universal Credit – welfare that works*, which aims to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives for those receiving benefits (DWP, 2010).

The interviews on which the findings in this report are based were conducted just after the change in government. At that stage, the changes outlined above had not been put in place, and so respondents were not yet directly affected by them. However, the findings from this stage of the LPO research are relevant to the future changes and will help inform the further roll-out of LPO to lone parent customers with a youngest child aged five. The findings are also of relevance to the coalition government's approach to the design and timing of eligibility for the 'core' Work Programme and its future approach to work incentives, and to making work pay for those receiving benefits. The concluding chapter of this report (Chapter 8) considers what implications the findings may have in light of the coalition government's future plans for welfare to work policy.

1.2 Evaluating Lone Parent Obligations

The evaluation of LPO is part of a consortia approach to the evaluation of the current welfare to work policy for parents. The consortium consists of the DWP and independent research organisations working on the evaluations of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents, In Work Credit and LPO. The aim of the consortium is to achieve consistent reporting and analysis across evaluations and to facilitate a strategic approach to research outputs.

The evaluation, as a whole, examines the LPO transition phase (the roll-out) and the final regime (the steady-state). In the transition phase the research considers the implementation, delivery, effects and experiences of the changing regime on lone parent customers whose IS eligibility has been reduced when their youngest child is aged seven to 15 (focusing on the first roll-out groups of lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 to 15 and the third roll-out groups of lone parents with a youngest child aged seven to nine). The final regime phase considers the IS regime for lone parents with a youngest child aged six and under. The evaluation comprises both qualitative (see Gloster et al., 2010; Casebourne et al., 2010) and quantitative studies, in addition to a review of international evidence (Finn and Gloster, 2010).

The qualitative work consists of a number of different elements. It covers the IS regime for lone parents as it will be once the roll-out of LPO is completed, the process and experience of losing entitlement to IS, and all the destinations that lone parents might move to once they lose this entitlement. A feasibility study for an impact assessment has been undertaken (Brewer et al., 2010), and the decision on whether a full impact assessment of LPO proceeds will be taken in Spring 2011³.

This report presents findings from a national, quantitative survey of lone parents affected by LPO, specifically those with a youngest child of six or seven at the time of the survey and who will be seven or eight when they leave IS (the third roll-out group). The survey was originally intended to be a longitudinal survey, taking place over a three-year period, and tracking lone parents' destinations and experiences over time. However, in response to the current fiscal climate and developments in policy, all elements of the LPO evaluation were reviewed. A single follow-up survey will now be conducted in early 2012 to explore outcomes for lone parents a year after their claim for IS has ended.

1.2.1 Research aims and objectives

The primary aim of the evaluation of LPO and new services for lone parents is to 'explore whether and how lone parent employment interventions provide an effective incentive to look for paid employment, alongside an effective package of support for workless lone parents to enable them to find, enter and sustain paid employment'.

Findings from the LPO baseline survey are presented in this report. The main aim of the survey is to provide a thorough understanding of the lone parents affected by the LPO changes, specifically by examining their:

- characteristics and circumstances;
- attitudes, values and beliefs in relation to work and family life;
- choices and constraints in relation to work;
- experience of and attitudes to their current (IS) benefit regime;
- behaviour in relation to work (for example, whether looking for work) and previous work, as well as childcare arrangements.

This allows an increased understanding of lone parents affected by LPO, and highlights important issues for the treatment of these customers in the future.

³ In addition, DWP Working Paper 93 (Tomaszewski et al., 2010) used FACS data to assess options for analysing constraints to employment among lone parents.

1.2.2 Scope of the quantitative survey

The findings in this report are based on a quantitative survey with a nationally representative sample of lone parents in the third roll-out group whose eligibility for IS ends when their youngest child is seven or eight.

This particular cohort gives a good indication of the issues facing the full range of lone parents affected by LPO. Respondents were selected as having a youngest child aged six or seven, but often also had children older than this, so the findings are relevant for other roll-out groups. At the same time, this group is most similar to the group newly affected by LPO: those with a youngest child aged five or six. The survey can therefore inform the roll-out of LPO to this group. In addition, the sample covered by the survey includes a wide range of customers in relation to work-readiness and distance from the labour market, including those in work (in particular those in ‘mini-jobs’) and looking for work, as well as those that do not expect to work again. As a result, the survey contains findings that have wider relevance for the JSA regime and the Work Programme, which will need to accommodate an increasingly wide range of customers.

More generally, this survey allows a detailed examination of lone parents on IS who have school-age children. Most previous studies of lone parents have either covered all ages of children, or have focused on those with younger (pre-school age) children. As many issues are different for school-age children (for example in relation to childcare), the survey allows an opportunity to look at this group’s needs and circumstances more clearly.

In addition, previous quantitative studies of lone parents on IS (the survey of IS customers conducted as part of the NDLP evaluation⁴, and the survey of customers experiencing lone parent WFI⁵) were conducted some time ago, and had a specific focus. This survey updates our understanding of this customer group, and also has a deliberately broad coverage, giving a comprehensive insight into lone parents’ characteristics, behaviour and attitudes, as well as detailed information on childcare arrangements and preferences. Of course, the survey focuses on lone parents with a youngest child aged six or seven (at the time of the fieldwork). However, wider evidence has been used to put the findings into context. By comparing this cohort with other LPO cohorts, as well as lone parents (and parents as a whole) in the population, we are able to identify the distinctive characteristics of this cohort, as well as to generalise the findings to a wider population.

1.3 Methodology

The findings in this report are based on a quantitative survey with a representative sample of lone parents in the third roll-out group of LPO across Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales).

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) were responsible for sampling, fieldwork, weighting and data processing. Further details on these technical aspects of the survey are provided in Appendix C.

1.3.1 Sample

The sample population comprised lone parents who were claiming IS in April 2010, and whose eligibility for IS was due to end between January and March 2011, when their youngest child was aged seven or eight. The sample population excluded known exemptions, such as those in receipt of Carer’s Allowance.

⁴ Lessof *et al.*, 2001; fieldwork conducted in 2000-2001.

⁵ Coleman *et al.*, 2003; fieldwork conducted in 2002-2003.

All respondents were included in the sample on the basis that they had a youngest child aged six or seven. However, when interviewed, 12 per cent of respondents said they had a youngest child aged under six, and one per cent said their youngest child was older than seven.

As noted above, the sample was drawn from administrative data for existing IS claims up until 2 April 2010. The presence of children aged under six can be explained as follows:

- Some new children had been born by the time of the survey interviews (which took place between May and August 2010).
- Respondents may not have declared some of their children by the time of the administrative data download in April 2010. Since Child Tax Credits were introduced in April 2003, many benefit recipients no longer claim a child premium as part of their IS claim so they are less likely to declare their children to DWP (despite declaring changes in circumstance being a condition of their claim).

An additional download of the administrative data was carried out in October 2010 to feed into the survey analysis. This indicated that six per cent of respondents had a youngest child under six. As well as recording recently born children, it is also possible that some lone parents declared younger children once they became aware of the rules for IS eligibility. However, this later download still under-represents all of the children covered by a claim; specifically:

- It only reports six per cent as having a youngest child under six (rather than 12 per cent as observed in the survey data).
- The number of dependent children is often lower in the administrative data than the survey data. For example, the administrative data indicates that 69 per cent of respondents had one dependent child only, compared with 33 per cent in the survey data. In addition, 50 per cent of respondents who said in the survey that they had four children were recorded as having just one child in the administrative data.

This may have implications for the actual numbers of lone parents who will move off IS. This is because, in addition to the known exemptions (for example foster parents), an additional proportion of customers whose eligibility is due to end will in fact be entitled to continue their claim.

All respondents have been retained in the survey analysis, irrespective of the actual age of their youngest child (although those with a youngest child aged under six have been analysed separately where appropriate). This is so that the survey can track all customers in this cohort who were scheduled to end their IS claim, including those who in fact retain eligibility. Remaining on IS is an 'outcome' which needs to be registered as part of the destinations examined by the survey.

1.3.2 Fieldwork

All selected cases were sent a letter giving them an opportunity to opt out of the survey. This is a standard procedure used when a sample is drawn from benefit records, and means that only the addresses of sample members who have not opted out are issued to interviewers to contact. The letter stressed that any information provided by respondents would be treated in strict confidence. A Welsh translation was provided for respondents living in Wales.

The advance letter described the survey as covering 'parents' views and experiences of benefits and work', and deliberately did not mention LPO or forthcoming changes (as was the case in the interview itself). This was because the survey was not intended to examine awareness of or attitudes towards LPO, but rather obtain a general picture of lone parents' attitudes and experiences.

16 Introduction

NatCen researchers conducted eight interviewer briefing sessions which were held between 17 and 25 May 2010. In total, 127 interviewers were briefed and worked on the study. All were trained members of NatCen's interviewing panel.

Interviews were conducted face to face in respondents' homes. Only the named customer could be interviewed (no proxies were allowed), and where this person had moved, interviewers attempted to trace the person to their new address. Interviews were conducted between 27 May and 25 August 2010. This means that interviews took place between:

- one and four months after respondents were confirmed as receiving IS at the sampling stage (in April 2010). This is reflected in the survey findings, which found the majority of lone parents still claiming IS when interviewed, while a small number had moved off IS into work or other destinations;
- five and ten months before their IS eligibility was estimated to end. Fieldwork was scheduled to try to minimise this variation, so that most respondents were interviewed around seven or eight months before their estimated IS end date. In order to achieve this, interviewers were asked to schedule their work according to the IS end dates, so that (where possible) those with earlier IS end dates were interviewed early in the fieldwork period, and those with later dates were interviewed at a later stage.

In total, 2,779 interviews were conducted, exceeding the target of 2,230. The response rate was 62 per cent (see detailed response figures in Table C.4). Lone parents who took part received £10 by way of thanks (in the form of a gift voucher) for their participation in the survey. This was given in recognition of the time the respondent had devoted to helping with the study.

Fieldwork was planned so that the majority of interviews were conducted before the school summer holidays; a total of 2,415 interviews were completed by 25 July 2010 (87 per cent).

Prior to fieldwork, a pilot survey was conducted in six areas, between 5 and 29 March 2010. As part of the pilot, 84 interviews were conducted (these interviews are not included in the survey findings presented in this report). Findings from the pilot informed the development of the final questionnaire. The main changes resulting from the pilot were: amendments to questions, particularly concerning childcare; amendments to question routing; and the supply of a survey leaflet for interviewers to leave with respondents.

The final questionnaire covered the following topics:

- classification and demographics;
- current status and employment details;
- past employment;
- benefits;
- choices and constraints with regard to work and family;
- jobsearch;
- experience of Jobcentre Plus;
- childcare arrangements;
- income;
- health and other characteristics.

1.3.3 Weighting and data processing

An experienced data processing team carried out coding and editing of questionnaires at NatCen's Brentwood offices. Researchers at NatCen were continuously involved in all complex editing decisions.

Data were weighted to reflect the actual profile of the cohort, using both selection and non-response weighting.

1.4 Interpretation of the data

When interpreting the findings for this survey, it should be borne in mind that the survey is based on a **sample** of customers (not the total population). This means that all findings are subject to sampling tolerances. Differences highlighted in the report are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level.

As noted above, some respondents had a youngest child aged under six. While these respondents should be exempt from the LPO changes (at least for the next year or so) and will be able to continue claiming IS, they are included in the survey findings, as they form part of the cohort examined by the survey. However, it is important to bear in mind that the characteristics of these respondents may differ from other respondents in the sample, for example in relation to childcare.

A proportion of the sample were in work at the time of the survey, and this allows us to examine issues relating to this work. However, these findings need to be treated with a degree of caution, because:

- the number of respondents in work is quite small: 191 were working while claiming IS, and 95 had left IS to start work;
- those who had left IS to start work had only started the job very recently, and this may affect perceptions of the job, particularly in relation to sustaining work and progression.

The report also compares findings from this survey with the wider population of lone parents, using data from FACS 2008, which covers the full population of British families with dependent children. While we would expect our sample of lone parents to be different from the wider population (as very few are in work, and by definition they will be on low incomes to qualify for IS), these comparisons help to quantify what is distinctive about the group of lone parents covered by the survey, in terms of their characteristics, childcare arrangements and attitudes to work and family.

Nevertheless, caution should be used in interpreting these comparisons with the wider population, because of differences between this survey and FACS; these include sampling method and selection criteria, as well as timing (the fieldwork for FACS 2008 took place two years before this survey). These comparisons should therefore be treated as indicative only.

A large number of tables appear in this report. The following conventions have been used:

- 0 = a 'true zero' (i.e. no responses in that category);
- * = less than 0.5 per cent, but more than zero responses.

1.5 Report structure

This report provides an examination of lone parents' characteristics, experiences and attitudes. Specifically:

- Chapter 2 examines the characteristics and circumstances of lone parents affected by LPO, focusing on the lone parents themselves, their children (including the age of youngest child) and their household. This chapter also looks at health and disability, skills and finance.
- Chapter 3 looks at respondents' working background and (where applicable) their current experiences of work. As well as identifying the type of work done by lone parents, it also looks at attitudes to work, and experience of family-friendly employment.
- Chapter 4 focuses on childcare, exploring current childcare arrangements, as well as past and possible future arrangements. This chapter also looks at attitudes to childcare availability, quality and affordability.
- Chapter 5 examines lone parents' attitudes to work and family, as well as the constraints to work that they face.
- Chapter 6 looks at lone parents' relationship with Jobcentre Plus, including the level of recent contact, and their perceptions of the type of support they have received. It also includes general attitudes to Jobcentre Plus and the IS regime.
- Chapter 7 examines work aspirations and the future. It covers lone parents' preferences and flexibility in considering work, as well as their approach to looking for work. It also looks at recent training activities.
- Finally, Chapter 8 draws out the conclusions from the survey and issues for the future.

2 Customer characteristics

Previous research has shown that lone parents who claim benefits are a heterogeneous group that has a variety of different characteristics (see, for example, Goodwin, 2008; Thomas, 2007). In addition, evidence has shown that job entry and employability can vary significantly according to individual and household characteristics. Therefore, in order to understand better what influences the work-orientation of lone parents affected by Lone Parent Obligations (LPO), it is important to understand fully their characteristics and circumstances. This analysis provides pointers to groups of lone parents who may find it more or less difficult to move into work in the future and helps to identify important issues for service delivery, as these customers move through quarterly Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA).

Specifically, this chapter examines the demographic characteristics of the lone parents interviewed in this survey, their education and qualifications, as well as health and disability. It also examines household characteristics: children and other adults living in the household, tenure, and also household income and financial issues. In addition, the chapter looks at the health of respondents' children, and the implications this has for their ability to work.

As noted in the Introduction, the survey covers lone parents receiving Income Support (IS) whose youngest child was aged six or seven at the time of sampling. The sample is therefore a specific sub-set of lone parents affected by LPO, and the characteristics of this group will reflect the age of their youngest child. To place findings in context, comparisons have been made, where possible, with other LPO cohorts, other lone parents on IS, and the wider lone parent population. Section 2.3 shows comparisons on a number of issues between lone parents in this survey, lone parents in the population, and mothers with partners in the population (using data from the Families and Children's Survey (FACS) 2008). In most cases this shows a consistent pattern. Lone parents in this survey show greater levels of need or deprivation than lone parents in the population and in turn, lone parents in the population show greater levels of need than mothers with partners.

2.1 Diverse characteristics

While previous studies of lone parents have highlighted the diversity of characteristics and needs, it might be expected that this sample would be less diverse, as respondents' youngest child was of a similar age. To some extent, this premise is implicit in policies such as LPO which group customers according to the age of their youngest child. In fact, the sample of lone parents interviewed in the survey showed considerable diversity in their characteristics. Moreover, because the age of the youngest child was consistent, this allows us to identify diverse characteristics more clearly. In other studies, this diversity can be confounded by the age of youngest child.

It is important to understand the diversity of customers' characteristics and needs when considering future service delivery. For example, by providing pointers as to how the JSA regime needs to accommodate different lone parent customers when their IS eligibility ends. This issue is discussed further in the Conclusions chapter (Chapter 8).

2.1.1 Children

All respondents were included in the sample on the basis that they had a youngest child aged six or seven. However, at the time of the survey, 12 per cent of respondents said their youngest child was aged under six (six per cent aged under one, two per cent aged one, and four per cent aged between two and five). In addition, one per cent said their youngest child was older than seven. This

issue has been discussed in the Introduction (Section 1.3.1). The presence of these lone parents in the cohort has implications for LPO, as they will be exempt from the LPO changes and will be eligible to continue claiming IS.

The respondents in the survey who had a youngest child aged under six showed some distinctive characteristics. As well as being younger, they tended to have more children than other respondents (24 per cent had four or more dependent children). Just four per cent were living with a partner⁶. They were also less likely than other respondents to be in work or looking for work at the time of the survey (as discussed later in the report).

Previous research by Marsh and Vegeris (2004) found no evidence that '*having new children reflected any conscious or unconscious strategy to build a workless lone-parent family that would become long-term clients of the State*'. The LPO qualitative research also found that, among those lone parent customers remaining on IS, '*there were no indications ... that they had chosen to care for a relative or have another child in order to remain on IS*' (Casebourne et al., 2010).

Table 2.1 shows the number of dependent children in the household (dependent children are defined as aged under 16 or aged 16-18 and in full-time education). Those with four or more children were less likely to have any qualifications than other respondents, and were more likely not to speak English as their first language, to live in socially rented housing and to have a child with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI) or Special Education Need (SEN). This indicates that lone parents with four or more children were likely to have a range of barriers and needs. The evaluation of lone parent WFI's (Thomas, 2007) found that '*the rate of movement into work is most strongly related to the number of children lone parents have*', with parents of more children less likely to move into work (see also Evans 2004).

Table 2.1 Number of dependent children

	%
One	33
Two	38
Three	20
Four or more	11
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>2,779</i>

We can also look at the ages of all children (not just the youngest child). Analysis by Brewer and Paull (2006) showed that mothers of children with larger age gaps tend to return to employment more quickly, which suggests it is important to consider the age of all children in the household.

The spread of children's ages is best summarised in terms of the type of school attended (details in Table A.1):

- Sixty-six per cent had children of primary school age only (comprising the 33 per cent with only one child, and another 33 per cent with two or more children both at primary school).
- Twenty-eight per cent had children at secondary school or sixth-form college (as well as children at primary school);

⁶ Those who were living with a partner at the time of the survey are included in the total sample of 'lone parents'. As with other respondents, they were claiming IS as lone parents when the sample was drawn in April 2010.

- Six per cent also had ‘adult’ children (aged 19 or over, or aged 16-18 but not in full-time education), in addition to children at primary or secondary school.

2.1.2 Male lone parents

The lone parents included in the survey were mostly female, although five per cent were male. Male lone parents showed some distinctive characteristics, which can be summarised as follows:

- Male lone parents tended to be older than women, and were more likely to have just one dependent child (44 per cent compared with 32 per cent).
- Caring responsibilities (for other adults) were more common for women than men (14 per cent compared with eight per cent).
- Male lone parents were more likely to have a driving licence than female lone parents (59 per cent compared with 38 per cent).

As seen in the remainder of the report, there were also some differences in relation to work and childcare. Among childcare users, male respondents tended to use more hours of childcare than women, but were less likely to use formal childcare such as after-school or holiday clubs. Awareness of after-school clubs was also lower among male lone parents.

When thinking about future work, men were more likely than women to say they would like to work for 30 hours or more per week. However, men were less likely than women to have been on a training course to help find a job in the previous 12 months.

2.1.3 Age and marital status

Although most lone parents had a youngest child aged six or seven, there was considerable variation in the age of respondents themselves, from under 25 (six per cent) to 45 or over (eight per cent). A full age breakdown by gender is given in Table 2.2, which shows that male respondents tended to be older than female respondents.

Table 2.2 Age profile by gender

	Column percentages		
	Male %	Female %	Total %
Under 25	3	6	6
25-29	17	27	26
30-34	20	24	24
35-39	24	21	21
40-44	19	16	16
45-49	9	6	6
50 or over	8	2	2
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	142	2,637	2,779

Respondents’ marital status is shown in Table 2.3. The sample showed a broad distinction between younger respondents, who tended to have one or two children and whose marital status was mostly single, never married; and older respondents, often with more (older) children who were more likely to be divorced or separated.

Table 2.3 Marital status

	%
Single, never married	66
Separated	15
Divorced	16
Widowed	1
Married and living with partner	1
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>2,779</i>

2.1.4 Ethnicity and language

One in five respondents (20 per cent) were from a non-white ethnic group: black (nine per cent), Asian (six per cent), mixed or other (five per cent). This profile is similar to other lone parents on IS. It is worth noting that (in comparison with the Census profile for Great Britain) the 'black' category contains a relatively high proportion of people describing themselves as black African, rather than black Caribbean: the total of nine per cent comprised five per cent black African, three per cent black Caribbean, and less than one per cent from other black backgrounds. This is relevant to the proportion of respondents whose first language is not English (discussed below).

Black respondents tended to be older and to have more children (18 per cent had four or more children), and were also more likely than those in other ethnic groups to have children aged under six. Asian respondents also tended to have more children than other respondents (48 per cent had three or more children), were more likely to have a parent living in the household, and were more likely to be owner-occupiers.

In total, 12 per cent of lone parents interviewed said that English was not their first language. This is closely linked with ethnicity (as shown in Table 2.4).

Overall, this analysis indicates that both black and Asian respondents may show a slower return to work, because of characteristics that are linked to greater distance from the labour market: having four or more children and not speaking English as first language (as noted below).

Table 2.4 First language, by ethnic origin

	Column percentages				
	White	Asian	Black	Mixed/other	Total
	%	%	%	%	%
English is first language	96	27	51	66	87
English is not first language	3	64	47	31	12
Bilingual	1	9	3	3	1
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>2,311</i>	<i>141</i>	<i>205</i>	<i>112</i>	<i>2,779</i>

Previous research has found that non-white mothers are slower to return to the labour market and less likely to work around the time of their child's school entry (Brewer and Paull, 2006). Other research reported that '*not having English as a first language is a more important factor in the lower proportions entering work than is being from a non-white ethnic group per se*' (Thomas and Griffiths,

2004), with ‘language skills a barrier to work, as well as cultural beliefs about the role of women in the workplace’ (Tackey et al., 2006).

2.1.5 Other adults in the household

Most households (88 per cent) contained the lone parent and their children, but no-one else. However:

- two per cent were living with a partner at the time of the survey (as noted below in Section 3.3, this was one of the main reasons why some respondents had left IS by the time of the survey);
- another 11 per cent contained other adults (other than the lone parent or partner); the relationship of these adults to the respondent was as follows:
 - six per cent contained ‘adult children’ (as noted above);
 - three per cent contained parents;
 - one per cent contained other relatives;
 - one per cent contained non-relatives;
 - in addition, one per cent had a grandchild of the respondent in the household.

The survey also examined whether these other household members were in work. Office for National Statistics (ONS) data (ONS, 2010) show that the workless household rate (the percentage of households in which no adults work) is considerably higher in lone parent households (40 per cent compared with 17 per cent overall). In this survey, in addition to the ten per cent of respondents who were in work at the time of the survey (see Chapter 3), four per cent of households had someone else in work.

As Table 2.5 illustrates, where households contained adults other than the respondent, it was not uncommon for these people to be in work; in total, 32 per cent were in work. The figure for partners and other relatives should be treated with caution, due to the small number of respondents.

Table 2.5 Households with other adults in work

Proportion of other adults who were in work	%	Base: All other adults in lone parent households
Partner	[46]	45
Adult child	24	202
Parent or grandparent	31	110
Other relative	[37]	49
All adults (other than respondent)	32	441

Note: the table excludes non-relatives, as the base is too small for analysis. Numbers in square brackets are percentages based on fewer than 50 observations.

2.1.6 Housing tenure

Two in three lone parents interviewed in the survey (67 per cent) rented their home from a local authority or housing association ('social renters'), while 25 per cent rented privately. Just seven per cent were owner-occupiers (see Table 2.6).

Table 2.6 Housing tenure

	%
Social rent	67
Private rent	25
Owner-occupier (including shared owner)	7
Rent free	1
Other	1
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>2,779</i>

These figures are consistent with other lone parents on IS; for example, figures are very similar to the sample of lone parents included in the New Deal for Lone Parents evaluation (Lessof et al., 2001). In general, lone parents (and in particular lone parents on IS) are much more likely to live in social rented housing than the population as a whole (see Section 2.3 for further details).

In this survey, older respondents and those in work were more likely to be owner-occupiers. Home ownership was also more common where there were other adults in the household such as a parent or other relative (particularly when these adults were in work). Those living in social housing were more likely to have four or more children and/or have adult children. They were also more likely to have longer IS claims and to have no qualifications. By contrast, private renters were more likely to live in smaller households with just one child, to be better qualified and to have a higher household income.

Previous evidence has identified that (in the population as a whole) levels of worklessness within the social rented sector are disproportionately high, and that particular characteristics inform the weak competitive position of many social tenants in the labour market: health issues, childcare responsibilities, debt, drug and alcohol dependence, criminal records and multiple disadvantage (Fletcher et al., 2008). In addition, our survey indicates that (among these lone parents) social renters tend to have a range of other characteristics which are linked to distance from the labour market: having four or more children, long IS claims and no qualifications.

While the high proportion of lone parents living in social housing raises implications for housing policy, previous research has found that, '*in the vast majority [of cases]..., living in the social rented sector [per se] did not present a barrier or disincentive to work. In addition, there was no evidence that levels of labour market attachment shifted when respondents moved between tenures*'. (Fletcher et al., 2008). In other words, social renting is associated with a range of barriers to work, but is not, in isolation, a barrier.

2.2 Disadvantage

This chapter has already identified characteristics that are associated with disadvantage and distance from the labour market. This section now focuses on specific types of disadvantage related to health, skills and income.

2.2.1 Illness and disability

The evaluation of lone parent WFIs noted that lone parents with long-term illness or disability '*have been found to be much less likely than average to start work following a lone parent WFI*' (Thomas, 2007). This reflects a broader association between worklessness and poor health seen in previous evidence, '*in part due to selection effect, but also because unemployment is harmful to*

'health' (Waddell and Burton, 2006). A detailed examination of this issue is therefore important to understanding the needs and barriers of lone parents covered by this survey.

In total, 28 per cent of respondents in this survey said that they had a longstanding illness, disability or infirmity of any kind⁷ (LSI). As is generally the case, the proportion with a LSI increased with age (from 15 per cent of those aged under 25 to 42 per cent of those aged 45 or over). It was also higher among those with a longer IS claim (31 per cent if the claim had lasted for three years or more).

There was also a link between respondents with a LSI and those with:

- caring responsibilities (37% of those with caring responsibilities also have a LSI);
- literacy or numeracy problems (34 per cent);
- debt or financial problems (36 per cent).

Section 2.2.2 also notes that the incidence of children with a LSI was higher where the lone parent had a LSI. Overall, these patterns confirm that lone parents with a LSI often have multiple and complex needs.

The types of illness or disability are shown in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 Type of illness or disability

	Multiple responses included	%
Depression, bad nerves	36	36
Problem with arms, legs, hands, feet, back, neck	33	33
Chest, breathing problem, asthma, bronchitis	22	22
Mental illness or phobia, panics or other nervous disorders	18	18
Heart, blood pressure or blood circulation problems	12	12
Stomach, liver, kidney or digestive problems	10	10
Skin conditions, allergies	8	8
Diabetes	5	5
Difficulty in seeing	5	5
Difficulty in hearing	4	4
Learning difficulties	4	4
Epilepsy	4	4
Other	4	4

Base: All respondents with a LSI

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It is possible to combine these individual types of illness or disability as follows:

- In total, 12 per cent of all lone parents said they had a mental health problem (either 'depression or bad nerves' or 'mental illness or phobia, panics or other nervous disorders'). This was higher for those not currently in work (13 per cent compared with four per cent of those in work). It was lower for black respondents (two per cent) and those whose first language is not English (seven per cent). The impact of mental health problems on employment and the economy has been well

⁷ Longstanding is defined as 'anything that has troubled you over a period of time or that is likely to affect you over a period of time'.

documented (see for example: The economic and social costs of mental health problems in 2009–10, Centre for Mental Health, 2010), and previous research has reported that ‘*lone parents have poorer mental well-being than the national average*’ (Casebourne and Britton, 2004). In a recent study of lone parents in work, several factors were found to ‘*have precipitated a period of stress or depression, including the onset of physical ill-health, caring responsibilities in relation to parents, bereavement, pressures at work, and debt*’ (Ridge and Millar, 2008).

- Nineteen per cent of all respondents reported a physical LSI. The overall difference by age mainly applies to physical, rather than mental health, problems.
- In total, five per cent of lone parents reported both a mental health and physical LSI. As noted below, these respondents were particularly likely to see their LSI as limiting and as affecting the type or amount of work they can do. This group of lone parents (with both a mental health and a physical problem) also show distinctive characteristics throughout the report (for example, in relation to work, finances and attitudes to Jobcentre Plus).

The majority of respondents with a LSI said that this limited their activities and affected the type or amount of work they could do. Table 2.8 summarises these figures based on the total sample.

Table 2.8 Proportion of lone parents with LSI

	%
Long-standing illness, disability or infirmity:	
• that limits activities (LLSI)	22
• that affects type or amount of work	21
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>2,779</i>

Respondents were more likely to say that their LSI was ‘limiting’ (LLSI) if:

- their LSI was a problem with arms, legs, hands, feet, back or neck (93 per cent with this type of problem described it as limiting, compared with 79 per cent of all respondents with a LSI);
- they had a mental health problem, especially ‘mental illness or phobia, panics or other nervous disorders’ (92%).

Respondents with mental health problems were also more likely than others with a LSI to say that it affected the type or amount of work they could do (84 per cent, compared with 75 per cent of all respondents with a LSI), and this figure was particularly high for respondents with both a mental health and a physical problem (87 per cent).

Administrative data indicates that the incidence of LSI is higher in other LPO roll-out groups. The figures in the administrative data are 18 per cent⁸ for the roll-out group covered by this survey (lone parents with a youngest child aged seven when IS eligibility is scheduled to end), and this rises to 32 per cent in roll-out groups 9 and 10 (youngest child aged 11 when IS eligibility ends) and 39 per cent in roll-out groups 4 and 5 (youngest child aged 14 when IS eligibility ends). This pattern is to be expected: as the incidence of LSI increases with age, we would expect the proportion to be higher in

⁸ The proportion with a LSI as indicated in the administrative data is lower than reported by lone parents in the survey. This is partly because the data collection method differs, but it is also possible that different illnesses and disabilities are being captured within the data. The same pattern has been found in previous surveys comparing self-reported figures with administrative data.

earlier roll-out groups (with older children). Nevertheless, these figures confirm the high incidence of illness and disability for the full group of lone parents affected by LPO.

Most respondents described their health over the previous 12 months as at least fairly good (see Table 2.9). As with the incidence of LSI, poor health increased with age (ten per cent of those aged under 25 described their health as not good, rising to 27 per cent of those aged 45 or over).

Table 2.9 Perception of health in last 12 months

	%
Good	45
Fairly good	36
Not good	19
Don't know	*
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>2,779</i>

2.2.2 Children's health and disability

According to lone parents in this survey, 18 per cent of children in the survey had a long-term illness or disability (LSI). This translates to 30 per cent of households where at least one child had a LSI. The most common types of illness or disability were:

- chest, breathing problem, asthma or bronchitis;
- skin conditions or allergies;
- learning difficulties.

Further details are shown in Table A.2.

Respondents were more likely to have a child with a LSI if they themselves also had a LSI (42 per cent, in line with the estimate for all lone parents in the population, as reported by McKay and Atkinson, 2007). Overall, in 12 per cent of cases both the lone parent and a child had a LSI.

Where respondents had a child with a LSI, 40 per cent said that the problem would affect the child's ability to attend school or college, and 61 per cent said that this would cause the respondent to spend more time caring for the child (18 per cent of the total sample). Respondents were particularly likely to say they would spend more time caring if their child had learning difficulties (89 per cent). Where respondents did need to spend more time caring, the majority (59 per cent) said that the extra work looking after their child would restrict their ability to work. This translates to 11 per cent of all respondents. In most cases, this was seen as restricting respondents to part-time work rather than not being able to work at all (see Table 2.10).

Overall, these findings confirm that a substantial proportion of lone parents had a child with LSI (30 per cent), often restricting their ability to work (11 per cent), but rarely preventing work altogether (three per cent).

According to lone parents, 77 per cent of children covered by the survey had been in good health over the previous 12 months, with 17 per cent described as having fairly good health and six per cent not good.

Table 2.10 Summary of children with LSI

	%
Households with child with LSI	30
• that affects ability to attend school/college	12
• that causes respondent to spend more time caring	18
• that restricts respondent's ability to work due to additional work caring	11
• that prevents respondent from working at all	3
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	<i>2,779</i>

2.2.3 Special Educational Need and school exclusion

In total, 12 per cent of the children covered by the survey had been identified at school as having a SEN⁹, including five per cent who had a statement of SEN. The main reasons for SEN were learning difficulties and behavioural problems. Details are shown in Table A.3.

Where children had learning difficulties, their SEN was described as mild in 42 per cent of cases, moderate in 35 per cent of cases, or as severe (14 per cent) or profound (two per cent).

Four per cent of children had been suspended from school in the previous 12 months, and one per cent expelled. Children of secondary school age were more likely to have been suspended or expelled than children at primary school: 17 per cent of lone parents with children at secondary school said that at least one child had been suspended or expelled. The figure was also higher where children had learning difficulties (24 per cent).

These figures relate to all children covered by the survey (not just the youngest child). This translates to six per cent of lone parents who had a child suspended from school in the previous 12 months, and one per cent expelled.

2.2.4 Caring responsibilities

The evaluation of lone parent WFIs found that lone parents with additional caring responsibilities were '*much less likely than average to start work following a lone parent WFI*' (Thomas, 2007). Nine per cent of lone parents in this survey said that they cared for someone other than their children because of illness, disability or infirmity. Where respondents had caring responsibilities, 41 per cent said it affected their ability to work (four per cent of the total sample).

Respondents were more likely to say they had caring responsibilities if they had a LLSI themselves (12 per cent), especially if they had both a mental health and physical problem (20 per cent). The proportion was also higher among respondents with financial problems (14 per cent), and where other adults were living in the household, particularly if this was a parent or grandparent (26 per cent) or other relative (22 per cent). This last finding suggests that the presence of other adults in the household can affect lone parents in different ways: in some cases, these other adults were in work or helped with childcare, but in other cases represented an additional caring responsibility for the respondent.

In total, 14 per cent of respondents said that their ability to work was restricted either by a child with LSI or by other caring responsibilities. This was higher for women than men (14 per cent compared with eight per cent) and, as noted above, was higher for those with a LSI themselves or with

⁹ 'A child has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her' (Education Act, 1996).

financial problems. The greater incidence of these restrictions among lone parents with a LSI and with financial problems confirms that some lone parents face a combination of different difficulties and barriers to work. At the same time, the presence of a LSI is widespread across the sample: in 50 per cent of cases, at least one person had a LSI: either the lone parent or a child or someone else that the respondent cared for.

2.2.5 Qualifications and skills

Previous research has found a link between lower education levels and worklessness, with less educated parents showing a slower return to work after the birth of their children, as well as being less likely to have worked prior to having children (Brewer and Paull 2006, Marsh and Vegeris, 2004). The sample of lone parents in this survey showed a wide variation in terms of their highest qualification, with 14 per cent qualified to Level 4 or above, but 31 per cent without any formal qualifications (see table 2.11). The qualitative research found that '*a number of customers talked of having fairly difficult school experiences which had impacted on their levels of engagement and attainment*' (Gloster et al., 2010).

Table 2.11 Highest qualification

Level	Example qualifications	%
No formal qualifications		31
Level 1 or entry level	GCSEs grades D-G; entry-level certificates; BTEC Introductory Diplomas and Certificates	12
Level 2	GCSEs grades A*-C; BTEC First Diplomas and Certificates; NVQs at Level 2	30
Level 3	A-levels; BTEC Awards, Certificates and Diplomas at Level 3; NVQs at Level 3	11
Level 4 or above	Degree-level qualifications and above; NVQs at Level 4+; HNDs and HNCs; BTEC Professional Awards, Certificates and Diplomas	14
Other		2
Not known		1
<i>Base: All respondents</i>		2,779

The proportion that did not have any formal qualifications was higher for a number of sub-groups:

- those not in work (32 per cent compared with 19 per cent of those in work);
- those with a LSI affecting the type or amount of work they could do (37 per cent);
- those with more children (45 per cent of those with four or more children) or with adult children (46 per cent);
- those with longer IS claims (37 per cent of those claiming for five years or more);
- respondents whose first language is not English (52 per cent);
- social renters (34 per cent, compared with 16 per cent of owner-occupiers and 25 per cent of private renters);
- those in urban areas (32 per cent, compared with 22 per cent in rural areas).

This analysis confirms that those without qualifications were also more likely to have other barriers to work. Respondents who were more highly qualified (to Level 4 or above) faced fewer barriers to work, but also showed distinctive characteristics in the survey (for example, they were critical of the level of support provided by Jobcentre Plus, as discussed in Section 6.5).

2.2.6 Access to vehicles and driving licence

Access to a vehicle and a driving licence have been identified in previous research as being linked to persistent (rather than temporary) poverty among lone parents (Barnes et al., 2008b). In addition, the qualitative research found that ‘transport was identified by many lone parents as an employment constraint’, particularly ‘*for those who were either unable to drive and/or do not have access to a car*’ (Gloster et al., 2010).

In this survey, 39 per cent of respondents said they had a driving licence, and of these, 74 per cent had access to a car or vehicle (29 per cent of all respondents). The proportion with a driving licence is consistent with the figure from the 2001 survey of lone parents on IS (Lessof et al., 2001) which covered all lone parents on IS, and therefore suggests that our respondent cohort is typical of lone parents on IS in this regard. These figures are substantially lower than for lone parents in the population, as discussed below (Section 2.3).

A number of sub-groups were less likely to have a driving licence or access to a car:

- female lone parents (38 per cent had a licence, compared with 59 per cent of male respondents);
- younger age groups (only 21 per cent of those aged under 30 had access to a vehicle);
- those whose first language is not English, and black respondents (31 per cent and 29 per cent respectively had a licence);
- those on lower income and without qualifications;
- social renters (particularly in comparison with owner-occupiers);
- those in urban areas (although only 46 per cent of those in rural areas had access to a vehicle).

There was also a pattern in terms of recent work experience, with those currently in work or who had worked since the birth of their oldest child most likely to have access to a vehicle (42 per cent and 38 per cent respectively), while this was lower for those who had not worked since the birth of their oldest child or those who had never worked (21 per cent and 17 per cent respectively). As with other examples of multiple disadvantage (for example, in relation to health, tenure, qualifications and number of children, as noted above) these patterns indicate a compounding effect of different characteristics related to worklessness. Previous research examining worklessness in the social rented sector suggests that the impact of multiple needs can be ‘additive’, with ‘*each disadvantage adding extra burdens and bringing a corresponding reduction in people’s competitive position in the labour market*’ (Fletcher et al., 2008).

2.2.7 Income and financial problems

Previous research has consistently shown lone parents to be more likely to experience financial hardship and to live in poverty, compared with mothers with partners (see for example Barnes et al. 2008b; Browne and Paull, 2010; Smith and Middleton, 2007).

Respondents were asked to place the total income of their whole household (before deductions for income tax, National Insurance, etc.) into one of 12 bands. Figures were therefore self-reported by respondents, and were not verified. Table 2.12 shows the figures for total household income by current work status. This indicates that those working less than 16 hours per week (mostly while remaining on IS) had a similar level of household income to those not working. This confirms previous research which found that the financial incentives in the benefits system for lone parents to work in mini-jobs were weak (Bell et al., 2007). Household income was higher among those working 16 hours or more per week (these respondents were often working exactly 16 hours per week).

Table 2.12 Total household income, by current work status

Total weekly income	Column percentages			
	Working 16+ hours/week	Working less than 16 hours/week ¹	Not in work	Total
	%	%	%	%
Under £100	9	17	16	16
£100-199	30	46	49	48
£200-299	33	24	23	23
£300+	24	6	6	7
Don't know/refused	6	6	6	6
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	107	182	2,490	2,779

¹ Note that most (84 per cent) of those working less than 16 hours per week were working no more than ten hours per week.

Household income was higher among lone parents with more children (the proportion with a weekly income of £200 or more ranging from 14 per cent of those with just one child to 77 per cent of those with four or more children). Income was also higher where there were other adults in the household, particularly when they were in work.

A number of questions were included in the survey to assess respondents' perceptions of how well they managed financially. The results from these questions are summarised in Table 2.13, which analyse findings by work status. It should be noted that working hours are closely related to benefit status (those working less than 16 hours mostly remaining on IS, while those working 16 hours or more generally having left IS recently to start work).

The pattern in Table 2.13 is not straightforward. In relation to managing financially and having money left over, those currently in work were more positive than those not in work, with those working 16 or more hours per week the most positive group. However, the pattern is different in relation to debt: those working 16 or more hours per week were more likely to be in debt than those working less than 16 hours. This may reflect the time spent in the job: those working 16 or more hours per week mostly started the job very recently, and as noted below, debt can be associated with employment change. Griffiths (2011b) found a similar pattern in relation to debt and hours worked.

Table 2.13 Perception of financial problems, by current work status

	Column percentages			
	Working 16+ hours/ week	Working less than 16 hours/ week	Not in work	Total
	%	%	%	%
Find it quite or very difficult to manage financially	30	30	44	43
Never have money left over at the end of the week	26	44	46	45
Trouble with debts almost all of the time	27	17	22	24
All of the above	10	14	19	18
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	107	182	2,490	2,779

Experience of financial problems was also higher among the following groups (percentages relate to the combined measure covering problems in all three areas):

- respondents with a LLSI (26 per cent), particularly those with a mental health problem (29 per cent), and highest for those with both a mental health and physical problem (34 per cent);
- those with a child with a LSI which restricted their ability to work (25 per cent);
- those with caring responsibilities (28 per cent);
- those with a household income of less than £100 per week (23 per cent), although this relates specifically to finding it difficult to manage financially; there was no difference by household income in relation to having money left over or debt;
- older age groups (although there was no difference in relation to debt).

In addition, experience of debt was higher among those with adult children, children with SEN and more recent IS claimants. It was lower among owner-occupiers, although otherwise there were no differences on these questions by housing tenure.

Overall, these findings indicate a different pattern for debt than for general financial management. Experience of debt is less obviously related to income or work status, but may be linked to changing circumstances. For example, it was higher among those who had moved into work recently and among recent IS claimants. It may also be linked with the needs of others, as experience of debt was also higher among those with adult children or children with SEN or an LSI restricting the lone parent's work.

Previous research evidence has found that, among lone parents, debt can be generated for various reasons, including: '*housing, partnering and re-partnering, tax credits and employment change*' (Ridge and Millar, 2008); specifically, '*debts from previous relationships that had broken down, and rent arrears due to problems with Housing Benefit claims during the transition to work*' (Casebourne et al., 2010). Overall, according to recent analysis, '*of all household types, lone parent households are the most likely to be in arrears with bills*' (Parekh et al., 2010).

This survey confirmed that very few lone parents had income from savings (just one per cent), and that receipt of child maintenance could be patchy (37 per cent said that they were supposed to receive payments but only 41 per cent of these respondents said that they usually received all of it). The LPO qualitative work also highlighted that financial support from friends or family was often limited (Gloster et al., 2010). As a result, many lone parents have little or nothing to fall back on if they face financial difficulties.

2.3 Comparisons with the wider population

This chapter has highlighted a range of characteristics that have been found to be associated with worklessness or poverty. In this section, we compare these characteristics for the LPO sample with the wider population of lone parents and mothers with partners. These comparisons have been made using data from FACS 2008, which covers the full population of British families with dependent children. In FACS, the respondent is usually the family's 'mother figure', that is, the person with the main responsibility for looking after the children in the family.

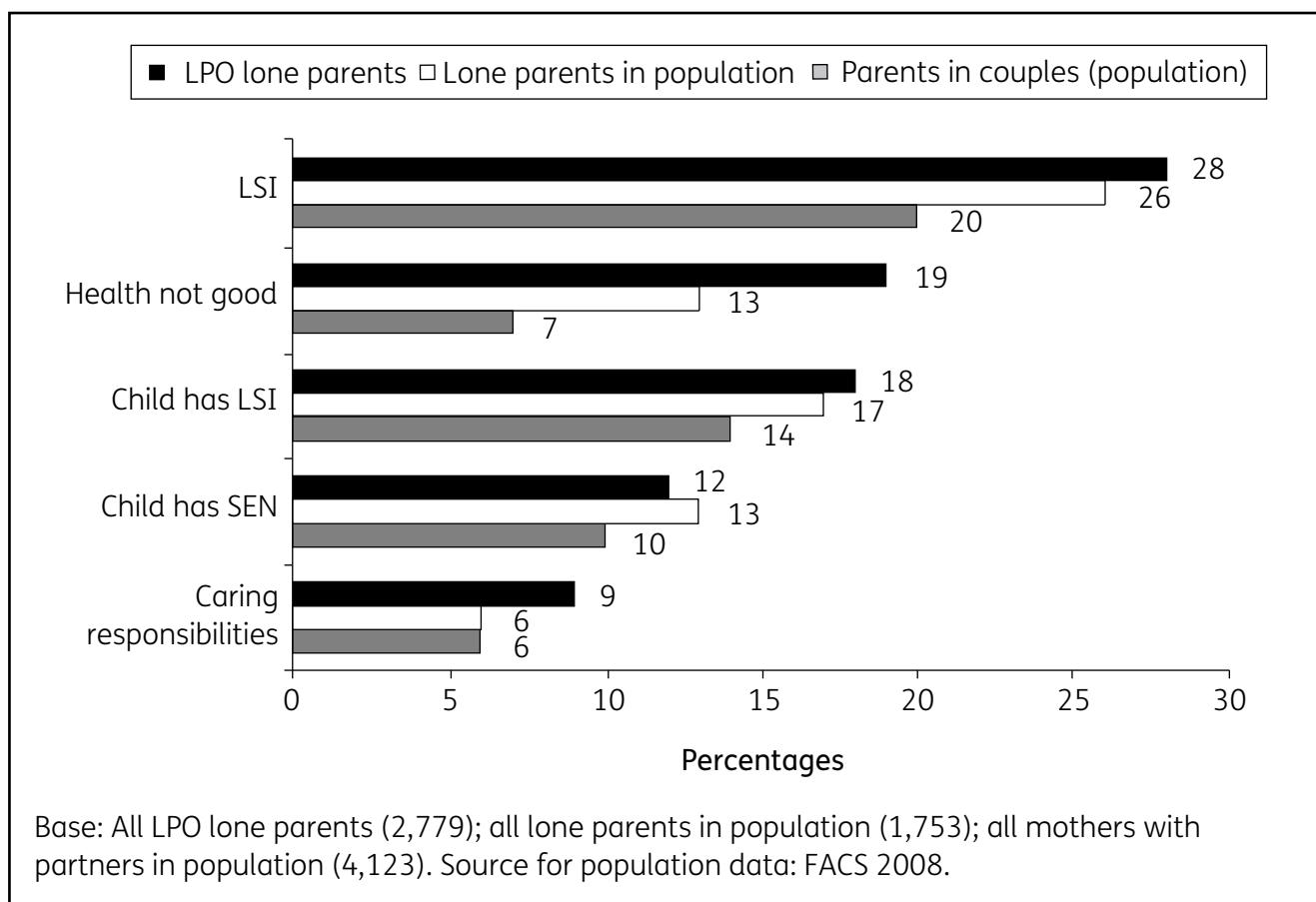
Because the majority of lone parents in this survey were on IS and not working, it is inevitable that they will show a higher incidence of characteristics linked to worklessness.¹⁰ Nevertheless, these comparisons are useful in that they enable us to identify key characteristics that are distinctive for this group of lone parents and which may require consideration in future service delivery, for example, to lone parents moving onto JSA.

¹⁰ See Introduction, Section 1.4 for general guidance on the comparisons with FACS data.

Figure 2.1 shows the comparative figures, for characteristics related to health, disability, children and caring. The chart shows that:

- incidence of LSI was similar for lone parents in this survey as in the lone parent population (although this comparison needs to be made with some caution as incidence of LSI is highly correlated with age). Analysis of FACS data shows a higher incidence of LSI among lone parents than mothers with partners (26 per cent compared with 20 per cent);
- in the population, the proportion describing their health as 'not good' is higher among lone parents than mothers with partners (13 per cent compared with seven per cent). The figure in the LPO survey (19 per cent) is higher still;
- according to lone parents in this survey, 18 per cent of children had a long-term illness or disability (LSI), a similar proportion as for lone parents generally (17 per cent in FACS 2008). In the population, children of lone parents were more likely to have a LSI than children with parents in couples. This confirms previous research: Clarke and McKay (2008) found that around one-third of disabled children live with a lone parent compared with around one-quarter of other children;
- the proportion of children with SEN (12 per cent) was similar to the wider lone parent population (13 per cent), and slightly higher than children with parents in couples (ten per cent). The same pattern applied to exclusions from school (not shown in Figure 2.1);
- nine per cent of lone parents in this survey said that they cared for someone other than their children because of illness, disability or infirmity. This is higher than the level reported in FACS 2008 for lone parents or mothers with partners (six per cent in each case).

Figure 2.1 Comparison on key characteristics (health, disability, children and caring): LPO lone parents, lone parents in the population, mothers with partners in the population



While most of the differences seen above were relatively small, there were some considerable differences on the items shown in Figure 2.2, on issues related to housing, skills, assets and finance:

- In general, lone parents are much more likely to rent (and in particular to rent from social landlords) than mothers with partners; lone parents in this survey were in turn far more likely to rent (and to rent from social landlords) than lone parents in the population. More details on this comparison are in Table A.4.
- Lone parents in this survey had much lower levels of qualifications than lone parents in the population as a whole, who were in turn less well qualified than mothers with partners. The proportion in the LPO survey without formal qualifications was also considerably lower than in the working-age population as a whole (11 per cent).¹¹
- The proportion in the LPO survey who did not speak English as their first language (12 per cent) was higher than among lone parents in the population and mothers with partners (three per cent and six per cent respectively).
- Access to a car, and possession of a driving license, were considerably lower among lone parents in this survey than in the lone parent population; in turn, this was much lower than among mothers with partners (Table A.5 gives more details on these measures).
- As already noted, previous research has consistently shown lone parents to be more likely to experience financial hardship and to live in poverty, compared with mothers with partners. This analysis confirms this, and shows that the total household income of lone parents in this survey is lower still: 64 per cent had a household income of under £200 per week (approximately equivalent to the figures below from the *Childcare and early years survey of parents* for income under £10,000 per year).
- Perceived financial problems were greater among the lone parents interviewed in this survey, compared with lone parents in the population, while reported problems among mothers with partners were considerably lower.

The figures above do not show analysis of number of dependent children. This comparison is problematic, as the number of children is closely related to the age of the youngest child. Nevertheless, evidence indicates that the average number of children for a lone parent on IS is around 1.9¹². In the wider population, on average lone parents have around 1.6 children, compared with around 1.8 children for couple parents¹³.

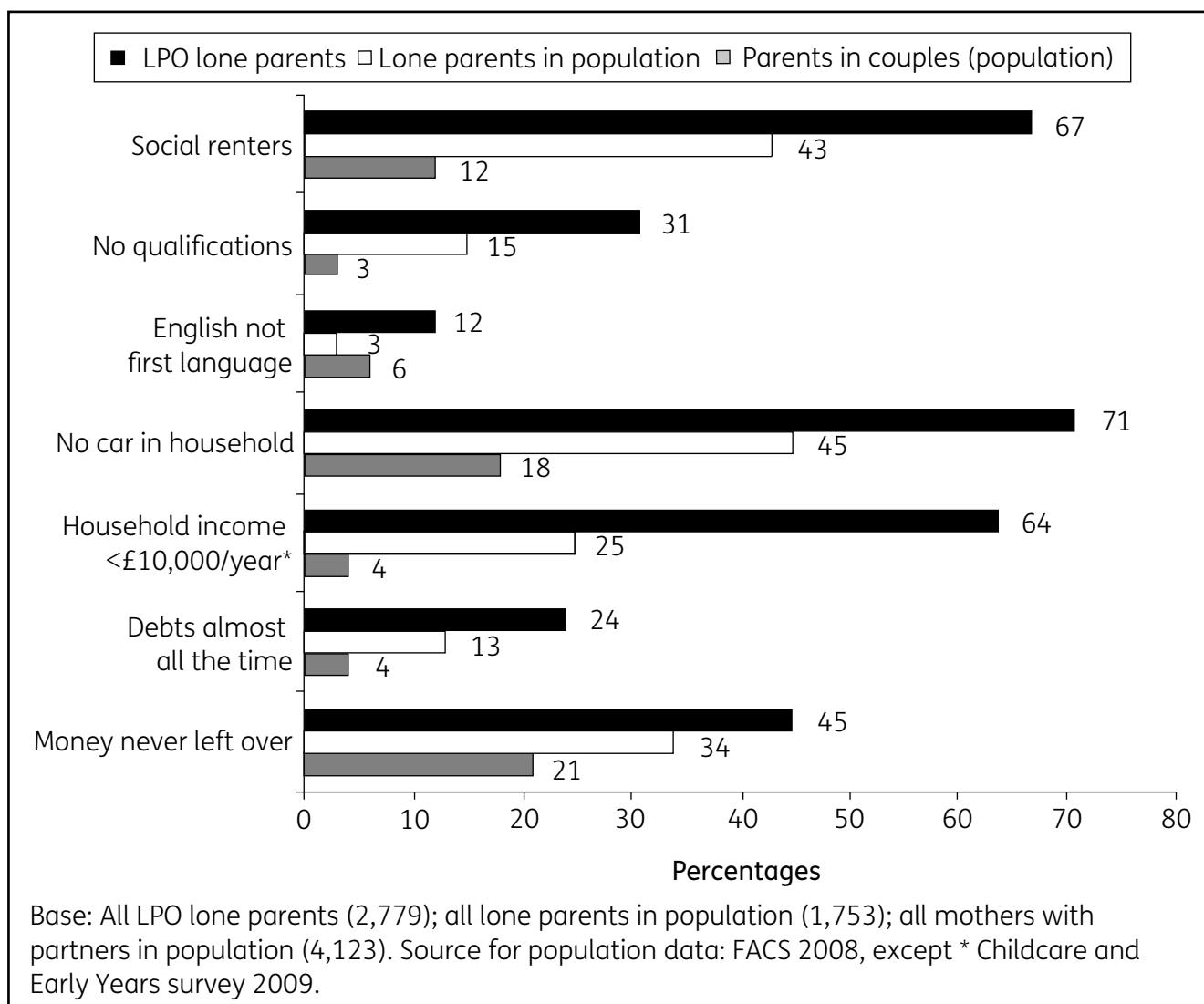
In summary, the comparison with population data shows that, compared with lone parents in the population, the lone parents in this survey were most distinctive in relation to worse self-reported health, lower income and greater financial-related problems, lower qualifications, lower vehicle access and higher levels of social renting.

¹¹ Figure from Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) statistical first release, June 2008 – <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000798/dsfr05-2008.pdf>

¹² Source: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, May 10.

¹³ Source: Labour Force Survey, Quarter 2 2010.

Figure 2.2 Comparison on key characteristics (housing, skills, assets and finance): LPO lone parents, lone parents in the population, mothers with partners in the population



2.4 Summary

- Although respondents were sampled as having a youngest child aged six or seven, 12 per cent had a youngest child under six at the time of the survey (including six per cent with a youngest child under one). These lone parents would therefore be exempt from the LPO changes until their youngest child is older.
- There was considerable diversity in terms of characteristics and circumstances. In particular, there was a distinction between younger respondents with one child, often single/never married, who were more likely to be private renters; compared with older, divorced or separated respondents with more children, generally in social housing. Overall, one in nine (11 per cent) had four or more dependent children.

- In 12 per cent of households there was another adult (in addition to the lone parent), most commonly grown-up children (six per cent), parents (three per cent) or a new partner (two per cent). The survey as a whole indicated that these other adults can either: provide support to the respondent, by helping with childcare or being in work; or represent an additional caring responsibility.
- The survey identified a number of characteristics that have been found in previous research to be linked to worklessness or greater distance from the labour market. Lone parents in this survey were most distinctive (that is, showed the greatest difference in comparison with lone parents and other parents in the population) in relation to worse self-reported health; lower income and greater financial-related problems; lower qualifications; lower vehicle access; and higher levels of social renting.
- In total, 28 per cent had a LSI. In most cases this was felt to affect daily activities and/or the work that respondents could do. In total, 12 per cent reported a mental health problem. One in five (19 per cent) said their health had not been good over the past 12 months.
- Three in ten lone parents (30 per cent) said at least one of their children has a LSI, and 11 per cent said the health of at least one of their children was not good. Overall, 11 per cent said that a child's LSI restricted their ability to work, although only three per cent said that they were unable to work at all. Nine per cent had other caring responsibilities (in addition to their children).
- There was a wide range in terms of qualifications: 31 per cent had none, but 14 per cent were qualified to Level 4 or above.
- Around two in five (43 per cent) said that they found it very or quite difficult to manage financially, while a similar proportion (45 per cent) said that they never had money left over at the end of the week or month. One in four said they had trouble with debts nearly all the time (24 per cent).
- It was common for lone parents to experience multiple types of need or disadvantage. For example, respondents with a LSI were more likely to have caring responsibilities and literacy or numeracy problems. They were also more likely to have a child with a LSI. The proportion that did not have any formal qualifications was higher for a number of sub-groups, including those with more children, those with longer IS claims, or whose first language was not English. Those without access to a car or vehicle were also more likely not to speak English as their first language, and were more likely to be on a lower income and to lack formal qualifications. Experience of financial problems was higher among respondents with a LLSI, those with a child with a LSI which restricted their ability to work, and those with caring responsibilities.

3 Working background and current employment

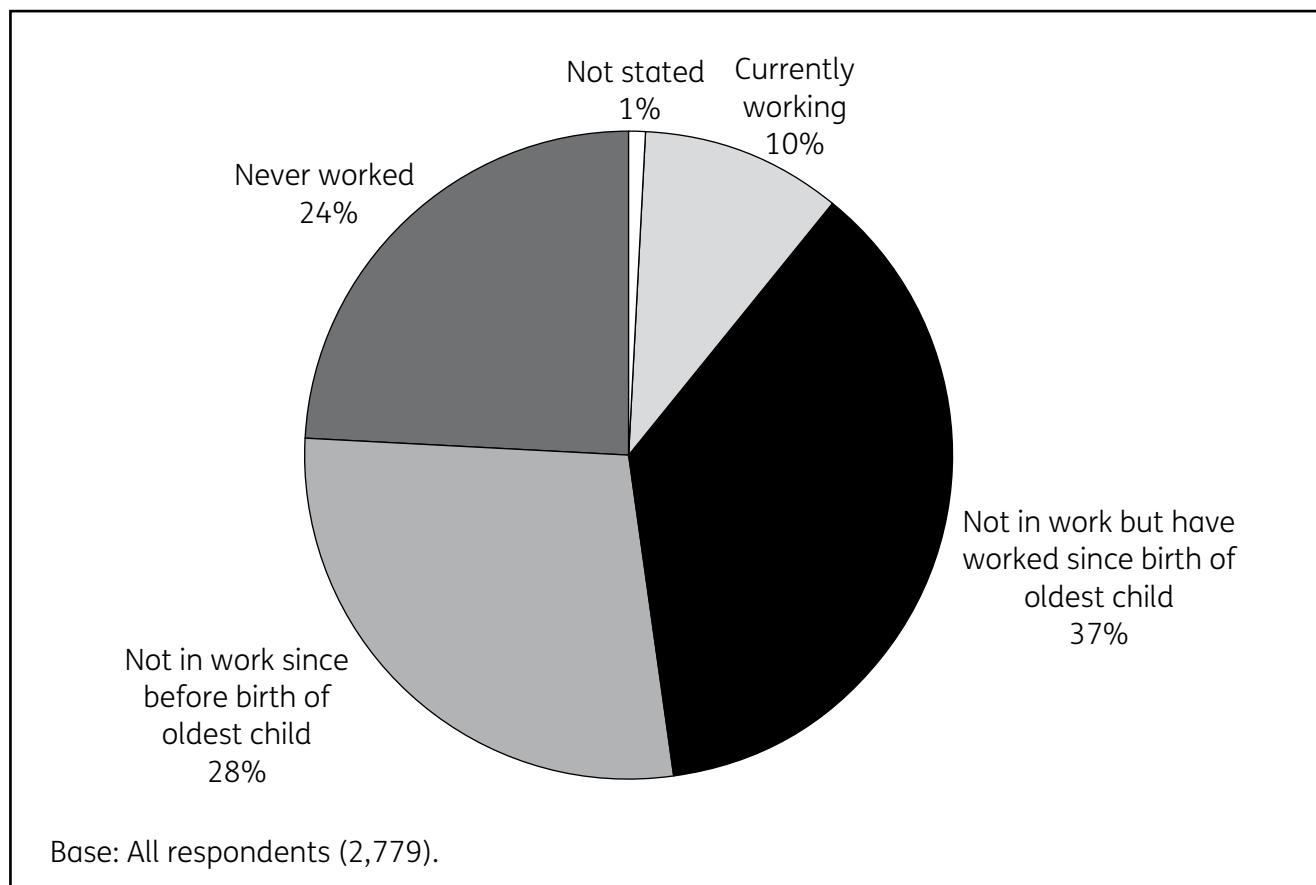
This chapter summarises key findings about lone parents' experiences of work and benefits. This includes details of their working background and the length of time they had been on Income Support (IS) at the time of the survey. In addition, it examines respondents' current activities at the time of the survey, including any work they were doing and benefits received.

Information about current and previous work activity is vital to an understanding of the Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) journey and lone parents' possible movement into work. Previous work history has consistently been found to be a key predictor of future movement into work (for example, Thomas, 2007), while current employment activity (including work of less than 16 hours per week while claiming IS) provides pointers to possible work in the future (as discussed in this chapter).

3.1 Work history

The work history of lone parents in this survey was mixed and included some who had never worked, some who had worked either before or after having children and a small proportion in work at the time of the survey (see Figure 3.1). Given the age of respondents' children (at least six at the time of the survey), this means that many lone parents had not worked for a considerable amount of time. Almost a quarter had never worked.

Figure 3.1 Work history



38 Working background and current employment

The proportion of lone parents who had never worked was higher among some sub-groups. This included respondents:

- who had literacy or numeracy problems (46 per cent of whom had never worked);
- with no qualifications (40 per cent);
- for whom English was not their first language (63 per cent had never worked);
- of Asian, black and mixed race origin (53 per cent, 45 per cent and 37 per cent respectively);
- aged under 25 years old (39 per cent);
- with four or more children (38 per cent).

Many of these sub-groups were also less likely to be looking for work, or expecting to work in the future (see Section 5.1). This confirms a close link between lack of previous work experience and distance from the labour market.

3.1.1 Characteristics of previous employment

Those lone parents who were not currently working but had worked in the past (either before or since the birth of their oldest child, 65 per cent of the sample) were asked about the type of job they had done when they last worked. On the whole, job characteristics were as expected and similar to the patterns found in previous research, which has shown the lone-parent working population to be associated with part-time work and lower-skilled occupations (see for example Maplethorpe *et al.*, 2010).

Most respondents were employees in their last job (96 per cent) and worked in either elementary, sales and customer service or personal service occupations (see Table 3.1). Only a small proportion had formal supervisory responsibilities (13 per cent). The proportion who worked in elementary occupations is considerably higher than among the wider population of lone parents or women in work, as discussed below in relation to current job characteristics.

Table 3.1 Standard occupational classification of previous employment

	%
Managers and senior officials	4
Professional occupations	1
Associate professional and technical operations	4
Administrative and secretarial occupations	11
Skilled trade occupations	4
Personal service occupations	18
Sales and customer service occupations	22
Process plant and machine operatives	6
Elementary occupations	30
<i>Base: All respondents not in work, who had worked in the past</i>	<i>1,840</i>

More detailed information about previous employment was asked of respondents who had worked since their oldest child was born. Findings show that:

- most of these lone parents had been permanent employees in their previous employment (77 per cent), while 19 per cent had been in temporary employment and four per cent were on fixed term contracts;
- previous employment was fairly stable, with 15 per cent of these lone parents in their last job for five years or more, 34 per cent for three to five years, 41 per cent between one and three years, and ten per cent for less than one year. However, most of those in temporary employment had been in the job for less than one year (78 per cent);
- most worked part time, with 19 per cent working less than 16 hours per week and 44 per cent working between 16 and 29 hours per week. 35 per cent worked 30 hours per week or more.

Those lone parents who had been employed since the birth of their youngest child had worked both during and outside school hours. As expected, the likelihood of working outside of school hours increased with number of hours worked. However, there were still many lone parents who had only worked during school hours and this applied to those who had worked in mini-jobs of less than 16 hours per week as well as those who had worked more than 16 hours per week (see Table 3.2). The majority of respondents (88 per cent) who had worked since having children did not change their working arrangements during the school holidays. Of those lone parents who did change their arrangements they tended to either take leave or work fewer hours.

Table 3.2 When worked (previous employment), by hours worked

	Column percentages		
	Less than 16 hours per week	16 to 29 hours per week	30 hours per week or more
Outside school hours	44	33	34
During school hours only	44	32	12
Both during and outside school hours	10	30	49
It varied	2	4	4
Base: All respondents not in work, who had worked since birth of oldest child	201	473	377

3.1.2 Reason for leaving previous employment

The main reasons given for leaving their last job by those lone parents no longer in work were varied, but were mostly personal reasons (63 per cent).¹⁴ Personal reasons included being pregnant (stated by 32 per cent of respondents) and the breakdown of their marriage or relationship (seven per cent). Job-related reasons were given by a further 20 per cent of respondents which included being made redundant (eight per cent) or the end of a fixed term contract or temporary job (six per cent). Eight per cent of respondents cited problems with childcare as the main reason for leaving their job.¹⁵

¹⁴ These findings are based on all lone parents who had worked in the past, not just those who had worked since the birth of their oldest child.

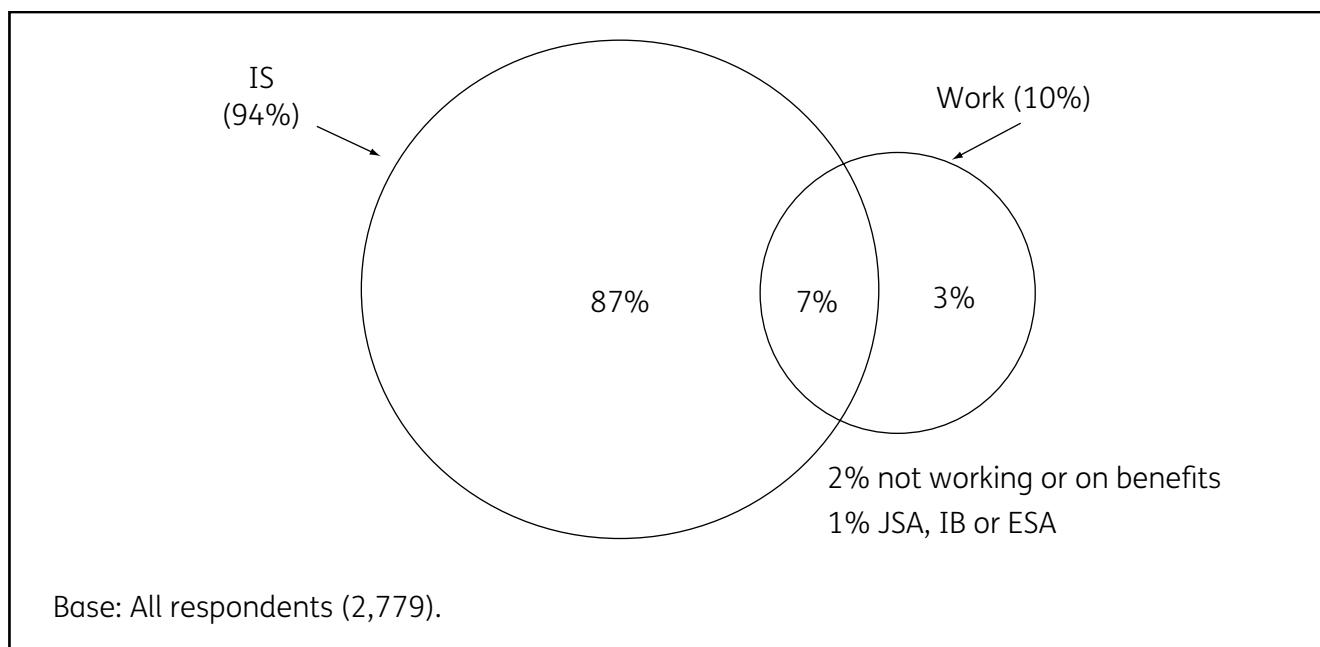
¹⁵ In addition three per cent cited financial reasons and other reasons were given by six per cent of respondents.

3.2 Current status

At the time of the interview, 94 per cent of respondents were still receiving IS. This is to be expected, given the short time frame (between two and five months) between the sample selection (when all respondents were receiving IS) and the survey interview. The six per cent who had left IS comprised:

- three per cent who had moved into work;
- one per cent claiming other benefits (Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Employment and Support Allowance);
- two per cent in 'other' destinations.

Figure 3.2 Current status of respondents



The same six per cent of respondents (who had stopped claiming IS) were asked why the claim had ended (see Table 3.3). This confirms that movement into work was the most common reason, while other respondents had re-partnered.

Table 3.3 Reasons for stopping IS claim

	Multiple responses included
	%
Claim ended because I started work/increased working hours	56
Claim ended because I started living with a partner	21
I was told that I had to claim JSA rather than IS	8
Claim ended because of the age of my youngest child	6
There was a problem with my IS claim	2
My circumstances changed (in other ways)	13
Other	1

These findings show no evidence of an ‘anticipation’ effect at this stage of the LPO journey. An ‘anticipation’ effect is where people cease claiming benefits prior to being required to attend interviews and/or take up places on labour market programmes, or are required to seek work, as in the case of JSA. However, this is not surprising as the survey took place at an early stage of the LPO journey (up to ten months before the IS claim was scheduled to end).

3.3 Current benefits

In addition to the current IS claim, most respondents in the survey were also claiming Housing Benefit (90 per cent) and Council Tax benefit (90 per cent). All respondents were receiving Child Benefit. The majority were also receiving Child Tax Credit (81 per cent). An additional three per cent were claiming Working Tax Credit (WTC), excluding any childcare element, and one per cent were claiming the childcare element of WTC. Previous research has found that tax credits can play a vital role in lone parents’ *‘decisions to enter employment and in ensuring that their employment was financially viable’* (Ridge and Millar, 2008).

Overall, six per cent of respondents were receiving Disability Living Allowance. Where this was the care component (among four per cent of respondents overall), 67 per cent said this was at the highest rate or middle rate and 30 per cent said this was at the lowest rate (the remainder were unsure). These findings have implications for the numbers of respondents who will flow onto JSA.

3.4 Current work

In total, ten per cent of lone parents were in work at the time of survey. In addition to the three per cent who had left IS to start work (as previously noted), seven per cent were working less than 16 hours per week while claiming IS (see Figure 3.2).

There was a clear distinction between the respondents who had left IS to start work and those who were working while continuing to claim. The former had mostly started work very recently; this is to be expected as all sampled respondents were claiming IS shortly before the survey fieldwork. A small minority (five per cent) of those who were working but not claiming IS said they started the job more than a year ago. This group is likely to comprise lone parents who were working while claiming IS, but then recently increased their hours and so were no longer eligible for IS. On the other hand, those who were working while claiming IS had often been in the job for some time: 55 per cent started the job longer than a year ago.

The two groups also differed in terms of hours worked (as discussed below), with those working while claiming IS inevitably working less than 16 hours per week, while those who were no longer claiming IS mostly worked 16 or more hours per week.

In terms of the characteristics of those who were in work at the time of the survey:

- owner-occupiers were more likely to be in work (19 per cent) than those in other tenures;
- those with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity that limits activity (LLSI) were less likely to be in work (five per cent), particularly those with a mental health problem (three per cent) and those with both a mental health and physical problem (one per cent);
- those with a youngest child aged under six were also less likely to be in work (five per cent).

The sub-group variations described above apply to both those working while claiming IS and those who had left IS to start work. In addition, more highly qualified respondents were more likely to work while claiming IS (ranging from six per cent of those without qualifications to 14 per cent of those qualified to Level 4 or above).

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We can now examine the work that respondents were doing at the time of the survey in more detail. As noted in the Introduction, these findings need to be treated with a degree of caution, because:

- the number of respondents in work was quite small (191 were working while claiming IS, and 95 had left IS to start work);
- those who had left IS to start work had only started the job very recently, and this may affect perceptions of the job (particularly in relation to sustaining work and progression).

3.4.1 Reasons for starting work

Overall, ten per cent of respondents were in work at the time of interview. Previous research has shown that it is often a life event or change of circumstances that enables them to enter work, such as their children getting older (Sims *et al.*, 2010). Nearly half of respondents in work (45 per cent) said that something changed that made it possible for them to start work at that time. This included:

- a suitable job coming up (for 28 per cent of those in work as a result of circumstances changing);
- children starting school (for 25 per cent);
- children getting older (nine per cent);
- their health improving (six per cent);
- finishing training or an educational course (five per cent);
- finding the right childcare (seven per cent) or child(ren) starting nursery (three per cent).

Other research has identified the financial security offered by employment to be an important trigger for lone parents starting work (see, for example, Ridge and Millar, 2008).

3.4.2 Job characteristics

As with previous work done by lone parents (see Section 3.1.1), current jobs tended to be low-skilled. In fact, current jobs were very much concentrated in low-skilled types of work, reflecting the small number of hours worked by many respondents who were working while claiming IS. Families and Children's Study (FACS) data for the lone parent population (Maplethorpe *et al.*, 2008) shows a marked difference between lone parents working 16 hours or more per week and those working less than 16 hours per week; the latter are far less likely to have supervisory responsibilities and to work in skilled occupations.

The job characteristics of those in work were as follows, and full details can be found in Tables A.6 to A.9:

- The majority were employees (92 per cent, with eight per cent self-employed)¹⁶.
- Most employees were in permanent positions (79 per cent, with 17 per cent in temporary employment and five per cent in fixed term contracts).
- Over half of employees were working for small employers of less than 25 staff (54 per cent, with 43 per cent working for medium-sized employers).

¹⁶ Similarly, 92 per cent of all women in work were employees and eight per cent were self-employed. Source: Office for National Statistics (ONS)/Annual Population Survey (APS), July 2009-June 2010 Great Britain (GB).

On the above job characteristics, those who were working while claiming IS were similar to those that had left IS for work. However, there were some differences between the two groups in relation to occupation and industry sector:

- Most respondents who were working while still claiming IS were in elementary occupations (58 per cent). Respondents who had left IS and entered work also worked in low-skilled jobs, although the proportion working in elementary occupations was lower (35 per cent).
- A relatively high proportion of those working while claiming IS worked in the education sector (36 per cent). Among those that had left IS for work, there was a more even spread across different sectors (such as accommodation and food service activities, health and social work activities and wholesale and retail trades).

Working respondents in this survey were more likely to be in elementary occupations than the wider female working population (see Table 3.4) or the lone parent working population (14 per cent in FACS 2008). These occupations were generally in hotels/restaurants (42 per cent) and health and social work (35 per cent). The same pattern of work in elementary and other low-skilled occupations applied to previous work done by lone parents in this survey (see Section 3.1.1).

Table 3.4 Standard occupational classification of current work of survey respondents claiming and not claiming IS compared with all women in work in GB

	Column percentages		
	Working while claiming IS ¹	Working, not claiming IS ¹	All women in work ² (GB)
	%	%	%
Managers and senior officials	0	0	12
Professional occupations	1	1	13
Associate professional and technical operations	2	11	16
Administrative and secretarial occupations	3	9	19
Skilled trades occupations	0	0	2
Personal service occupations	23	25	16
Sales and customer service occupations	10	14	10
Process plant and machine operatives	1	4	2
Elementary occupations	58	35	11
Base: All respondents in work	191	95	n/a

Sources:

¹ LPO survey 2010.

² ONS/APS for all women in work, July 2009–June 2010 (GB).

Only six per cent of respondents in work had supervisory responsibility, and this was the same for those still on IS and those who had left IS to work. The proportion with supervisory responsibilities who had moved off benefits and into work was lower than that of the wider population of lone parents; in FACS 2008, 29 per cent of lone parents working 16 or more hours per week had supervisory responsibilities. This difference is a reflection of hours worked (supervisory responsibilities being more common in full-time work), and may also be a reflection of the more recent move into employment for lone parents in this survey.

3.4.3 Hours

Table 3.5 shows the hours worked by working respondents. As noted above, those working while claiming IS were, in almost all cases, working less than 16 hours per week. Those who had left IS to start work were generally working 16-29 hours per week, with a minority (19 per cent) working 30 or more hours per week.

As shown in Table 3.5, where respondents were working less than 16 hours per week (also known as ‘mini-jobs’), they were often working a very small number of hours. A similar pattern was identified in the survey of IS claimants undertaken as part of the 2001 New Deal for Lone Parents evaluation, indicating that this cohort of lone parents is typical in often working a very small number of hours while claiming IS. In the wider lone parent population, there is a more even spread of hours among those in mini-jobs, although the number of hours still tends to be smaller than mothers with partners who work in mini-jobs. Hales *et al.* (2007) have linked the small number of hours worked by lone parents in mini-jobs to the earnings disregard on IS.

Table 3.5 Hours per week in current job

Hours per week	Column percentages	
	Working while claiming IS %	Working, not claiming IS %
Up to 5	42	2
6-10	42	4
11-15	8	1
16-20	5	62
21-29	1	10
30 or more	1	19
Base: All respondents in work, and giving an answer for hours worked	193	95

As noted in the introduction, the sample for this survey is unusual in that most respondents in work were still receiving IS (191 out of 289 respondents). This means that the proportion working in a job of less than 16 hours per week was much higher than in the wider population; in FACS 2008, just seven per cent of working lone parents were working less than 16 hours per week (lower than mothers with partners: 16 per cent). Bell *et al.* (2007) found a similar pattern, noting that the financial incentives in the benefits system for lone parents to work in mini-jobs were weak. The LPO qualitative research also found that *‘the complicated process of providing evidence on mini-jobs appeared to have put some lone parents off them’* (Casebourne *et al.*, 2010).

Future analysis of administrative data (in conjunction with data from this survey) could indicate the extent to which lone parents currently working in mini-jobs move into work of 16 hours per week or more. Iacovou and Berthoud (2000) identified a pattern in which mothers moved from not working at all, through a transitional period in a mini-job, to working 16 or more hours per week. They suggested that a gradual transition might suit some people who found it difficult to move directly from not working to a ‘full-time’ job. However, Hales *et al.* (2007) found no evidence for this when analysing FACS data, and Bell *et al.* (2007) found quantitative evidence ‘inconclusive’ as to the role of mini-jobs as a ‘stepping stone’ into work of longer hours.

Lone parents working while receiving IS were mostly doing these jobs during school hours only (71 per cent were only working during school hours; see Table 3.6); this reflects the small number of hours worked by these respondents. Lone parents who had left IS to start work were generally working both inside and outside of school hours (45 per cent) or only during school hours (32 per cent).

The majority of respondents did not change their working hours during the school holidays. This was higher for those who were still claiming IS (87 per cent) compared with those who had left IS to start work. This is likely to reflect the small number of hours worked, as discussed above.

3.4.4 Attitudes to current job

Most lone parents who were working at the time of the survey said that they were satisfied with their job (see Table A.10). Very similar figures were obtained in the evaluation of lone parent Work Focused Interviews (see Coleman et al., 2003), indicating that these findings are typical of the wider population of lone parents receiving IS. There was no variation in satisfaction among different sub-groups or by type of work.

In the recent research on In Work Credit (IWC), lone parents also reported having a positive experience of working. This included: '*getting out of the house and meeting new people, enjoying learning things and being given responsibility, finding the work interesting, gaining job satisfaction and confidence, and feeling proud to be at work*' (Sims et al., 2010). There was also a general sense among the lone parents and their children participating in Ridge and Millar's (2008) study that work was beneficial for the lone parent's self esteem and well being. However, there were some difficulties and frustrations: some lone parents in the study found that work brought its own costs in terms of greater levels of stress, less time for children and other things, as well as extra financial costs, for example travel or clothes. Lone parents in the qualitative research also reported that, although they generally found that work had a positive effect on their home life and children, they sometimes found it stressful combining work and family responsibilities, for example, when a child was sick (Casebourne et al., 2010).

Table 3.6 Summary of attitudes to current job, by hours worked

	Column percentages		
	Working 16+ hours per week %	Working less than 16 hours per week %	Total
			%
Very or fairly satisfied with job	84	89	87
Very or fairly easy to stay in current job	59	87	78
Pattern of working hours is convenient for home and family life	69	92	84
Job prevents them from giving the time they want to their children (at least sometimes)	42	14	23
Base: All respondents currently in work	107	182	289

Most respondents in this survey said that they found it very or fairly easy to stay in their current job, and the majority said that their pattern of working hours was convenient for their home and family life. However, Table 3.6 shows that there were differences according to hours worked. Although the

level of satisfaction with the job was similar, those working 16 hours or more per week were less likely to say their working pattern was convenient (69 per cent, compared with 92 per cent working less than 16 hours per week). Similarly, those working 16 hours or more per week were more likely to say that their job prevented them from giving their children the time they wanted to (42 per cent said this happened at least ‘sometimes’, compared with only 14 per cent of those working less than 16 hours per week). Table A.11 provides further details.

Those working 16 hours or more per week were also less likely to say that it was easy for them to stay in their current job. This may partly be because these respondents had only recently started the job (and therefore may have felt less secure in it), but this still highlights an important issue, given the importance of work retention for lone parents. Previous research has indicated that work retention and progression reduce the risk of poverty among lone mothers (Browne and Paull, 2010), but that lone parents are less likely than mothers with partners to experience a permanent return to work (Brewer and Paull, 2006; Millar and Ridge, 2008).

The small number of respondents in the survey currently in work, and the fact that many of those working 16 hours or more per week had only recently started the job, means that the findings presented in this chapter should be interpreted with some caution. The findings do at least suggest that lone parents tend to find the balance between work and family life to be better when they work less than 16 hours per week rather than 16 hours or more, and that hours worked are critical to the tensions observed above in the qualitative research and previous evidence. Given the importance of balancing work and family, this suggests that lone parents will often need encouragement and support to start work of 16 hours or more per week, and to stay in that work. This has implications for the introduction of Universal Credit, as discussed in the Conclusions chapter (Chapter 8).

3.4.5 Employment benefits and flexibility

According to lone parents who were not in work, the largest barrier to work that they faced was needing a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their children (see Chapter 5). In addition, one in four said that the lack of family-friendly employers was a large barrier to work. Previous research has also found that decisions about work can also be influenced by employers’ flexibility (Bell *et al.*, 2005). In addition, the availability of flexible and family-friendly working arrangements can be a key element in lone parents’ ability to balance work and care successfully and, therefore, sustain employment (see for example, Ridge and Millar, 2008; Griffiths and Durkin, 2007).

Respondents were asked about the availability of flexible or family-friendly arrangements in their current job. Some respondents said that their employer offered time off when their child was ill (19 per cent paid and 28 per cent unpaid), but flexi-time was also offered in only 16 per cent of cases. A pension and sick pay were each provided in around one in three cases (see Tables A.12 and A.13 for details).

Only five per cent of those in work (or with a partner in work) said that their employer provided childcare or helped to pay for childcare.

The findings in this section suggest that employers often offer little in the way of flexible and family-friendly arrangements. Also, as noted in Section 3.4.4, those working 16 hours or more per week were more likely to report problems in combining work and family. In addition, a perceived barrier to work was that employers are not very family-friendly (see Chapter 5), and some respondents in work said that the pressure to work longer hours or do overtime was a large barrier to staying in work (nine per cent).

3.4.6 Advancement

Around two in five lone parents who were in work at the time of the survey said that they wanted to ‘get on and improve their pay and terms’ (41 per cent), while the majority (59 per cent) said they wanted to ‘stay as they are for now’. These findings did not vary by hours worked, and were very similar to the figures obtained in the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) evaluation for lone parents in work¹⁷.

Other research has shown that job progression is often difficult for lone parents. In their study tracking a group of lone parents over a period of four to five years, Ridge and Millar (2008) found that ‘opportunities for advancement at work were restricted both by home caring responsibilities, which constrained hours of work, and/or by the nature of employment which often had little scope for wage enhancement and/or advancement of any kind’. The recent evaluation of IWC also found little evidence of lone parents advancing in their jobs, in terms of progression, promotion and pay rises. Where job advancement did occur it tended to be in relation to having undergone job-related training and taking on additional responsibility, rather than formal promotions or pay rises (Sims *et al.*, 2010).

The ERA evaluation noted that lone parents often needed time to adjust to starting work before they could think about advancement, and also found that the perception of advancement varied in light of their caring obligations. Some were motivated to advance to provide for their children financially or to be a working role model. Others, who felt they should limit their work ambitions in order to spend more time with their children, were likely to be more interested in advancement as their children got older (Hoggart *et al.*, 2006).

3.5 Summary

- The work history of lone parents in this survey was varied. Twenty-four per cent had never worked, 28 per cent were not in work but had worked before having children, and a further 37 per cent were not in work but had worked since the birth of their oldest child. Ten per cent of lone parents were in work at the time of the survey.
- Lone parents with literacy or numeracy problems, Asian, black and respondents from mixed or other ethnic groups and those for whom English was not their first language were more likely to have never worked. Younger lone parents (aged under 25) and those with four or more children were also more likely to have never worked.
- Previous employment had been permanent for most lone parents (77 per cent of those not in work had been in permanent positions in their previous jobs). The main reasons given for leaving their last job by those no longer in work were varied but were mostly personal reasons (63 per cent). For example, 32 per cent reported the main reason for leaving their last job was because they were pregnant. Job-related reasons were given by a further 20 per cent of respondents which included being made redundant, or the end of a fixed term contract or temporary job. Eight per cent of respondents cited problems with childcare as the main reason for leaving their job.
- Most respondents were still receiving IS at the time of the survey, although six per cent had stopped claiming; this was mainly because they had started work or re-partnered. In total, ten per cent of lone parents were working at the time of the survey: three per cent who had left IS to start work, and seven per cent who were working (less than 16 hours per week) while claiming.

¹⁷ Taken from the ERA 12-month customer survey fielded in 2005.

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- Those who were working while claiming IS had often been in work for some time (55 per cent more than a year), and tended to work a small number of hours per week (42 per cent up to five hours per week, and 42 per cent between six and ten).
- Those who had left IS and entered work were mainly in low-skilled occupations (35 per cent in elementary occupations and 25 per cent personal service occupations) and were more likely to be in these occupations compared with the female working-age population. Those working less than 16 hours per week while claiming IS were also in low-skilled occupation (58 per cent in elementary occupations and 23 per cent in personal service occupations).
- The majority of working respondents were satisfied with their job (87 per cent), and found it convenient for home and family life (78 per cent). However, those working 16 hours or more per week had greater problems balancing work and family (42 per cent said that sometimes their job prevented them from giving their children the time they wanted to).
- Some respondents said that their employer offered time off when their child was ill (19 per cent paid and 28 per cent unpaid), and 16 per cent said their employer offered flexi-time. Just five per cent said that their current employer provided childcare or helped to pay for childcare.

4 Childcare

The availability of good quality, reliable, accessible and affordable childcare has commonly been construed as a cornerstone of a welfare system that would make work possible for lone parents. Reviews of the effectiveness of active labour market interventions in increasing the rate of lone parents' employment have typically indicated that provision of childcare is a vital part of these programmes (Harker, 2006; Freud, 2007).

The survey, therefore, includes a comprehensive examination of childcare for lone parents affected by Lone Parent Obligations (LPO). Specifically, it examines the childcare arrangements that lone parents use, and have used in the past, as well as their expectations for the future. It also looks at lone parents' attitudes to the quality, availability and affordability of formal childcare, and their awareness of childcare provided by schools. In addition, the survey examines attitudes to childcare in the context of more general views on work and family, and perceived constraints to work.

As a result, the survey provides a picture of how childcare issues affect this group of lone parents. This is done by exploring barriers and preferences alongside current (and previous) behaviour, by anticipating future behaviour, and by identifying the key issues that can help these lone parents to move into work. The results can also be compared with the wider lone parent population to see how this group is distinctive¹⁸.

In this chapter, we look at the childcare arrangements that lone parents use, and have used in the past, as well as their attitudes to formal childcare provision. The chapter also covers lone parents' future expectations and preferences for childcare in relation to work. Chapter 5 places attitudes towards childcare in a more general context, by considering lone parents' attitudes to work and barriers to work, with childcare issues included alongside other attitudes and constraints.

Childcare is devolved in Scotland and Wales and this may affect various issues related to childcare provision, including availability and cost of childcare for lone parents. However, any possible differences were not reflected in the findings as there were no patterns of variation in the responses between lone parents in England, Wales and Scotland.

Issues relating to childcare differ greatly according to children's age, particularly in relation to formal childcare. Most of the respondents included in this survey had school-age children only. Therefore, the findings presented in this report provide a clear assessment of childcare issues for the lone parents affected by LPO but these issues differ from many previous studies of lone parents (which often focus on childcare for under fives).

Throughout this chapter, findings have been analysed by respondents' current work status (those working 16 hours or more per week, less than 16 hours per week, and not working). This analysis is important, as work status and hours worked are key factors affecting childcare arrangements. However, as noted in the Introduction (Section 1.4), findings for working respondents need to be treated with caution, as the number of respondents in work is small, and this applies in particular to those working 16 or more hours per week (just 107 respondents).

More generally, it is important to bear in mind that childcare is not just used by parents to fit around work or training. For example, breakfast and after-school clubs cover a wide range of activities

¹⁸ Questions on current childcare arrangements and attitudes to formal childcare were consistent with the wording of questions in the 2008 Families and Children's Study (FACS) and/or the *Childcare and early years survey of parents 2009*; questions on previous arrangements and future expectations were added to provide additional information on these issues.

(including extra-curricular activities), while informal childcare (for example, with the ex-partner or grandparents) may be part of the family's social arrangements. Lone parents may not necessarily see childcare as a route towards employment, or even perceive their current arrangements as 'childcare'. Therefore, this should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings, particularly in relation to the possible impact on employment.

4.1 Current arrangements: overall use of childcare

Respondents were firstly asked about their current use of childcare. As part of the interview, respondents were read a definition of childcare: '*By childcare, I mean care carried out by anyone other than yourself or your partner [if any partner in household]*'. At the same time, respondents were handed a card listing the different types of childcare that could be considered part of this definition (the list corresponds to the items shown in Table 4.2). This approach is the same as used in the 2008 FACS, enabling us to compare these findings for lone parents with a youngest child aged six or seven, with the wider parent population.

Overall, around two in five lone parents said they used childcare of some kind (42 per cent). As expected, this differs according to working status. Sixty-nine per cent of those in work used some form of childcare compared with 39 per cent of those not in work.

Looking first at those in work at the time of the survey, the vast majority of those who were working 16 hours or more per week used some form of childcare, while this was much lower for those working less than 16 hours per week (87 per cent compared with 59 per cent, see first row of Table 4.1). Where respondents were working and did not use any childcare, they were asked what they did instead. Most said they only worked during school hours (84 per cent).

There was some variation in the use of childcare among lone parents who were **not in work** at the time of the survey. Respondents were more likely to use childcare if they were younger (47 per cent of those aged under 30 used childcare of some kind) or only had one child (46 per cent). The proportion using childcare was lower among lone parents who were further from the labour market, specifically those who:

- did not have any qualifications (30 per cent);
- had never worked (29 per cent) or did not expect to work in the future (24 per cent). The use of childcare was similar between those looking for work and those who were not looking for work but expected to work in the future;
- did not speak English as their first language (22 per cent). Use of childcare was also lower among Asian respondents (22 per cent), confirming previous research which found that use of childcare was lower among Pakistani and, in particular, Bangladeshi households (Smith *et al.*, 2010).

4.1.1 Formal and informal childcare

Different types of childcare can be classified as 'formal' or 'informal', as indicated below in Table 4.2. This approach mirrors FACS 2008.

Lone parents in the survey were more likely to use informal than formal childcare (36 per cent compared with 16 per cent). Looking at the results by work status (as shown in Table 4.1), the main difference was among those working 16 hours or more per week, who were more likely to use both formal and informal childcare than other respondents. The use of formal childcare was very similar between those working less than 16 hours per week and those not working at all (16 per cent and

14 per cent respectively) – the difference between the two groups was in the greater use of informal childcare among those working less than 16 hours (54 per cent compared with 33 per cent).

This suggests that lone parents who work less than 16 hours per week increase their use of informal childcare, but do not tend to increase their use of formal childcare. Rather, it is the move to work of 16 hours or more per week that appears to prompt an increase in use of formal childcare. In many cases, this may be linked to childcare subsidies becoming available through Working Tax Credit (WTC); lone parents need to work 16 hours or more a week to claim help with childcare costs through WTC¹⁹. This pattern is different for the wider lone parent population, as seen in FACS 2008. FACS data indicates that use of formal childcare increases steadily with hours worked: from 13 per cent of those not working, to 21 per cent of those working less than 16 hours per week, to 29 per cent of those working 16–29 hours per week, and 41 per cent of those working 30 hours or more²⁰ (see Section 4.1.2 for further analysis of FACS). The different pattern in the LPO survey may reflect the very small number of hours worked by many respondents (which means that a move into work often requires little or no additional childcare).

Table 4.1 Summary of childcare use

	Column percentages				
	All in work	Working		Not in work	Total
		Working 16+ hours/week	less than 16 hours/week		
	%	%	%	%	%
Use any childcare:	69	87	59	39	42
Any formal childcare	23	34	16	14	16
Any informal childcare	61	75	54	33	36
Formal childcare only	8	12	5	6	7
Informal childcare only	46	53	43	25	27
Both formal and informal childcare	14	22	11	8	9
Base: All respondents	289	107	182	2,490	2,779

4.1.2 Types of childcare used

Table 4.2 shows the individual types of childcare used. The figures are based on those lone parents who used childcare at all. Grandparents were the most frequently used type of childcare, with ex-partners, other relatives and friends/neighbours the other main types of informal childcare. These findings confirm the importance of family and close friends to this group of lone parents. When considering barriers to work, many respondents said they were only prepared to leave their children with family or close friends when they were working (37 per cent), and where family and friends were not available for childcare this was seen as one of their biggest barriers to work (36 per cent); see Chapter 5 for more details.

¹⁹ Chapter 7 also discusses the impact of the current benefit system (including tax credits) on hours worked (Section 7.1.1).

²⁰ Percentages are adjusted to reflect the LPO age profile, as discussed in Appendix C.

Previous research confirms the prominent role played by grandparents. FACS 2008 data shows grandparents as the most common type of childcare across all age groups and different types of family. Other research has found that, for lone parents, '*grandparents played a key role in providing support across a range of areas including childcare, financial and emotional support*' (Ridge and Millar, 2008). The same research found that older siblings make an important contribution, playing '*a key role in sustaining their mothers in work. This included taking on household chores, managing their own care and sometimes the care of their younger siblings*'. At the same time, this research noted that '*although generally children appeared to undertake these roles willingly, there were signs that both children and mothers were sometimes concerned about what was required of children to keep the working household going*' (Ridge and Millar, 2008).

Table 4.2 analyses the figures by work status. The table is based on childcare users, so indicates the use of different arrangements (when childcare is used at all). The ex-partner is the one type of childcare which has significantly higher use among childcare users in work, compared with those not in work. This is discussed further in Section 4.1.4 in relation to hours of childcare.

In general, however, the figures in Table 4.2 show very little variation by work status in individual types of childcare. This suggests that a move into work does not generally tend to prompt a greater reliance on specific types of childcare.

Table 4.2 Types of childcare used, among childcare users

	Multiple responses included Column percentages				
	All in work %	Working 16+ hours/ week %	Working less than 16 hours/week %	Not in work %	Total %
Formal childcare					
Nanny, au pair or childcarer in the home	1	1	0	*	*
Baby-sitter who came to home	5	5	6	4	4
Breakfast club or after-school club, on school/nursery school site	17	18	17	24	23
Breakfast club or after-school club, not on school/nursery school site	5	7	4	7	6
Holiday club/scheme	7	7	8	5	5
Other childcare provider	5	8	3	3	4
Informal childcare					
My ex-husband/wife/partner/the child's non-resident parent	26	22	30	19	21
The child's grandparent(s)	56	56	58	54	54
The child's older brother/sister	13	13	13	11	11
Another relative	20	27	15	25	24
A friend or neighbour	20	18	23	18	19
Base: All using childcare	207	94	109	990	1,197

In addition to the patterns noted above by hours worked, the following sub-group variations applied to childcare users **in work**:

- Those with primary school-age children only were more likely than those with secondary school age children to use their ex-partner (29 per cent compared with 20 per cent) and grandparents (62 per cent and 44 per cent).
- Related to this, those with only one child were more likely than those with two or more children to use grandparents (68 per cent compared with 47 per cent). Respondents with only one child were also more likely to use both formal and informal childcare, and to use holiday clubs (12 per cent compared with four per cent).

For childcare users **not in work**:

- Lone parents who were looking for work used similar types of childcare to those not looking for work.
- Those qualified to Level 4 or above were more likely to use formal childcare, specifically breakfast clubs not on school sites and holiday clubs. Use of older siblings was greater among those with lower qualifications.
- As one would expect, the use of older siblings for childcare was highest where there was an ‘adult’ child in the household (used in 51 per cent of households where there was an ‘adult’ child, and in 25 per cent of cases where there were secondary-school-age children but no adult children). The presence of ‘adult’ children also reduced the use of grand-parents and the ex-partner.
- Use of formal childcare was higher among those who had taken training or education classes in the previous 12 months, to improve skills, help them to do a job or find employment²¹. Linked to this, childcare users whose first language was not English were also more likely to use formal childcare (these respondents were also more likely to have taken part in training). Childcare users whose first language was not English had a lower use of informal childcare, specifically the ex-partner or grandparents, although they were more likely to use friends or neighbours.
- Those with a child with long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LSI) were also more likely use formal childcare only.
- The use of the respondent’s ex-partner was higher than average among those with a more recent Income Support (IS) claim (often reflecting a more recent separation from the partner), and was also higher in rural than in urban areas.
- Use of formal childcare, specifically after-school or holiday clubs, was lower among male lone parents.

4.1.3 Breakfast and after school clubs

Breakfast or after-school clubs on school sites were by far the most commonly used type of formal childcare (see Table 4.2). This reflects the age profile of children covered by the survey – predominantly primary-school-age children, with very few pre-school children. As noted at the start of this chapter, however, childcare is not just used by parents to fit around work or training. Breakfast and after-school clubs cover a wide range of activities (including extra-curricular activities), and are used by parents for a variety of purposes. This is reflected in the relatively high use of breakfast or after-school clubs by childcare users who were not in work (as shown in Table 4.2). Those on lower incomes (less than £200 per week) were also more likely than other respondents to use breakfast or after-school clubs on a school site.

²¹ Lone parents on New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) may be entitled to financial support to pay for childcare if they are undertaking a course which the adviser considers may help them move into work.

However, as seen in Section 4.3, lone parents often thought of breakfast or after-school clubs as a childcare option for future work. Therefore, this is a potentially important facility for lone parents when looking to move into work.

4.1.4 Comparison with FACS

It is possible to compare the findings from this survey with those from FACS 2008. This allows a comparison between the lone parents in this survey with the wider lone parent population, as well as with mothers with partners. This helps to assess how similar or different the lone parents in this survey are to the wider population. This is important, as many studies have examined in detail the childcare arrangements and preferences of lone parents on benefits, without necessarily indicating whether findings are distinctive or part of a broader pattern. This is discussed further in this section.

In order to make these comparisons, the figures for lone parents in FACS have been adjusted, so that the age profile of children corresponds to the LPO survey. This adjustment is necessary as use of childcare varies dramatically according to the age of the child. Nevertheless, while this adjustment makes the findings from the two surveys broadly comparable, comparisons should still be made with caution, as the profile of the children in the two samples will still be different (in terms of number and ages of siblings), and this may impact on childcare use. In addition, the fieldwork for FACS 2008 took place two years before this survey. Availability of childcare may have changed during this time reflecting, for example, government funding of extended services in schools.

Table 4.3 compares the findings for the two surveys, with figures broken down by work status (working 16 or more hours per week, working less than 16 hours per week, and not working). Note that for the purposes of comparison, figures are based on all **children** receiving childcare, rather than at the household/parent level. The table shows that:

- among those in work (either working 16 or more hours per week or less than 16 hours), LPO lone parents were more likely to use informal childcare than the wider lone parent population in FACS, and were slightly less likely to use formal childcare.²² Overall, use of childcare (either formal or informal) was higher among LPO lone parents than those in FACS (due to their much greater use of informal childcare);
- in FACS 2008, the use of childcare (both formal and informal) was very similar between lone parents and mothers with partners;
- among those not in work, the figures in the two surveys were very similar for lone parents' use of both formal and informal childcare. However, in FACS 2008, use of childcare was lower among couples where neither partner is in work, compared with lone parents not in work. This was entirely due to the greater use of informal childcare by lone parents. This means that the use of formal childcare is similar in all three groups, but informal childcare is higher for lone parents (LPO and FACS) than mothers with partners. This is confirmed in the *Childcare and early years survey 2009*, where (for all ages 0-14) use of informal childcare was also higher among lone parents, '*related to the greater likelihood that children in lone parent households will spend time with their non-resident parent*' (Speight et al., 2009).

The use of individual types of childcare was similar for lone parents in the LPO and FACS surveys, except that LPO parents were more likely to use other relatives (excluding grandparents and older siblings) for childcare. This applied to both those in work and those not in work. This may indicate that lone parents affected by LPO sometimes have access to a wider family network than lone parents as a whole.

²² The difference is statistically significant for those working 16 or more hours per week, but not significant for those working less than 16 hours per week.

Table 4.3 Comparison of childcare use in LPO survey and FACS 2008, based on individual children

	Column percentages	
	Children of LPO lone parents %	Children of FACS lone parents %
Parent working 16 or more hours per week:	(184)	(1,359)
Use any childcare	80	72
Use formal childcare	26	34
Use informal childcare	72	58
Parent working less than 16 hours per week:	(339)	(138)
Use any childcare	58	48
Use formal childcare	15	21
Use informal childcare	51	33
Parent not working:	(5,270)	(1,460)
Use any childcare	35	39
Use formal childcare	12	13
Use informal childcare	29	31

Base: All children (individual bases as indicated)

Source for children of FACS lone parents: FACS 2008.

Overall, this analysis confirms the extensive use of informal childcare among lone parents. For those in work, this was higher among LPO lone parents than the full lone parent population in FACS, while among those not in work, both LPO and FACS lone parents were more likely to use informal childcare than mothers with partners.

Previous research has examined the use of informal childcare among lone parents and a perceived reluctance to use formal childcare. This has been linked to a mistrust of some types of formal childcare, particularly childminders (Bell *et al.*, 2005), and a preference for minimising the use of any childcare and to use friends and family wherever possible (Ridge and Millar, 2008). These same patterns have also been found in the LPO qualitative research and the research on In Work Credit (Gloster *et al.*, 2010; Sims *et al.*, 2010). To some extent, this survey confirms these findings: in considering barriers to work, many lone parents (particularly those further from the labour market) said that they either wanted to look after their children themselves or restrict childcare to close friends and family.

However, although many lone parents in this survey used informal childcare only, the level of use of formal childcare was similar both to other lone parents and to mothers with partners. This may partly reflect the age of children covered in this survey (generally school age) for whom formal childcare is mostly school-based (breakfast or after-school clubs on school sites). Previous research has found a greater trust in this type of childcare among lone parents (Bell *et al.*, 2005). At the same time, findings from FACS and the *Childcare and early years survey of parents* (Maplethorpe *et al.*, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2010) show that use of formal childcare is generally very similar between lone parents and mothers with partners.

4.1.5 Hours of childcare

The survey asked about the amount of time spent in childcare per child per week, both during term time and school holidays. Table 4.4 shows the mean number of hours for individual types of childcare, as well as for all formal and informal childcare. The first two columns show figures based on users of the relevant type of childcare (that is, how many hours each type was used among those using it). The figures were highest for childcare by the ex-partner/non-resident parent and for holiday clubs. Overall, hours of informal childcare were typically higher than formal childcare hours (9.21 and 3.85 hours per week respectively in term time, 11.10 and 3.03 respectively in school holidays).

The two columns on the right of the table show the mean number of hours for all respondents using childcare (of any type). This shows how the total childcare package was typically made up. These columns indicate that, overall, users of childcare used around nine hours of childcare per week in term time and over ten in school holidays, and that this was made up predominantly of informal childcare. This was due to the greater overall use of informal rather than formal childcare (as discussed previously), as well as to the larger number of hours spent in informal childcare. In particular, childcare provided by the ex-partner and by grandparents accounted for the majority of childcare hours overall (the former because of the large number of hours provided by ex-partners, and the latter because of the widespread use of grandparents for childcare).

The childcare provided by the ex-partner has implications for lone parents' movement into work. As seen in this section, the hours of childcare provided by the ex-partner far exceeded those for other types of childcare. As seen in Section 4.1.2, the ex-partner was also the one type of childcare which had significantly higher use among childcare users in work, compared with those not in work. This suggests that the ex-partner can be crucial in enabling some lone parents to move into work or to increase their hours.

At the same time, these findings should be treated with a degree of caution, as the survey does not tell us when the ex-partner provided these hours of childcare. For example, they may take place at weekends or in the evening, and so may not necessarily help lone parents to enter work or work more hours. As a result, it is difficult to assess the impact these hours of childcare have on lone parents' employment.

Table 4.4 Mean number of hours per week of childcare

Mean number of hours per child	Of those using relevant type of childcare		Of all respondents using childcare	
	Term time	School holidays	Term time	School holidays
Formal childcare	3.85	3.03	1.39	1.09
Nanny, au pair or childcarer in the home	(small base)	(small base)	0.03	0.01
Babysitter who came to home	2.86	2.55	0.11	0.10
Breakfast club or after-school club, on school/nursery school site	3.69	1.02	0.84	0.24
Breakfast club or after-school club, not on school/nursery school site	4.35	2.91	0.27	0.18
Holiday club/scheme	(0.62)	10.54	0.15	0.54
Informal childcare	9.21	11.10	7.78	9.38
My ex-husband/wife/partner/the child's non-resident parent	15.98	17.48	3.01	3.59
The child's grandparent(s)	7.01	8.00	3.51	4.34
The child's older brother/sister	2.64	3.01	0.27	0.34
Another relative	3.27	3.38	0.70	0.82
A friend or neighbour	1.70	1.63	0.30	0.30
All childcare			9.17	10.68

Base: All respondents using relevant type of childcare/any childcare

Note: the hours given for breakfast or after-school clubs in school holidays are likely to be an over-estimate. Some respondents said that their childcare arrangements were the same in school term time and in school holidays, including hours of breakfast or after-school clubs; however, it is likely that these hours relate only to term time.

4.1.6 Payment for childcare

There has been a strong policy emphasis on providing help with the affordability of childcare, particularly for those on low incomes. This includes tax credits: Child Tax Credit (CTC), a means tested annual amount paid directly to parents, and the childcare element of WTC, which parents can apply for if they are using registered childcare (so excluding informal help from family/friends). As part of the latter, the maximum amount that families can claim for the childcare of one child is £175 per week and £300 per week for childcare for two or more children, with 80 per cent of eligible costs covered, although this is due to be reduced to 70 per cent as announced in the 2010 Spending Review (Her Majesty's Treasury, 2010b). Alternatively, childcare vouchers can help with the cost and can be redeemed by approved childcare providers. These vouchers can be given in return for a salary sacrifice, that is a reduction in the amount of pay received (Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs WTC5, 2009). The qualification rules mean that childcare vouchers tend to be used by those with higher earnings. Those with lower earnings are more likely to qualify for tax credits. As a result, CTC and WTC are of greater relevance for the lone parents covered by this survey. As noted in Section 7.2, lone parents on NDLP may also be entitled to financial support to pay for childcare if they are undertaking a course which their adviser considers may help them move into work. Formal childcare, such as after-school clubs, may also be available to some parents free of charge.

In this survey, around one in four lone parents that used childcare of some kind said they had to pay for at least some of it (24 per cent). While payment for informal childcare was unusual (five per cent of those using informal childcare paid for it), more than half had paid for formal childcare (57 per cent of those using formal childcare). These figures are broadly similar to those obtained in the *Childcare and early years survey of all parents 2009* of children aged 0-14 (Smith et al., 2010). Table A.14 lists each individual type of childcare, and shows the proportion of users who paid for it.

As well as payment for childcare, the survey asked whether lone parents did anything else in return for the informal childcare they received. Overall, around half (47 per cent) of those using informal childcare said they did something in return for at least part of the childcare they received. This was most likely to happen when respondents had help with childcare from friends and neighbours. For example, 41 per cent of those using friends or neighbours for childcare said they looked after their children in return. Given the fairly high proportion of lone parents using this type of childcare, this suggests that reciprocal arrangements with friends and neighbours form an important part of the overall childcare package for many lone parents in the survey. Further details are in Table A.15.

4.2 Previous childcare arrangements

Respondents who were not currently in work but had worked since the birth of their oldest child were asked about the childcare arrangements in their most recent job²³. Given the small number of respondents in work at the time of the survey, asking about previous experiences helps to give a fuller picture of childcare arrangements during work. Among those that did use childcare of some kind, over half used formal childcare. This is a higher figure than for those currently in work, but this reflects the younger age of children at that time, as well as the higher proportion of respondents working 16 hours or more per week in previous jobs, compared with current jobs. In addition, it is possible that respondents' recall of formal childcare was greater than of informal childcare, particularly for jobs that happened sometime in the past. In general, these findings should be treated with a degree of caution because of possible recall error.

Respondents who were either in work at the time of the survey, or had worked since the birth of their oldest child, were asked how often their childcare arrangements broke down. Key findings were that:

- the majority said that they rarely broke down (73 per cent), although eight per cent said they often broke down and 19 per cent said they sometimes did (see Table A.16 for further analysis);
- overall, ten per cent of respondents who had worked since the birth of their oldest child said that it was very difficult for them to stay in the job because of childcare arrangements breaking down.

²³ Due to a programming error, these questions were also restricted to those who currently used some form of childcare (i.e. questions mistakenly excluded those who had worked since the birth of their oldest child but who did not currently use any childcare). This means that figures for overall use of childcare may not be representative, although findings provide a useful indication of use of different arrangements.

4.3 Future childcare arrangements

If respondents were not currently using any childcare but planned to work in the future, they were asked what types of arrangement they thought they would use when they moved into work.

Respondents expressed a strong interest in after-school or holiday clubs (see Table 4.6). Taken at face value, the findings suggest that lone parents who start using childcare in the future will use these facilities more than is happening at present. However, this is a hypothetical question, and may reflect an interest in the principle of after-school or holiday clubs, rather than a firm intention to use them. Indeed, the question may have tapped either respondents' preferences or their views on likely availability. In the LPO qualitative research, most parents said that they would 'avoid using childcare by tailoring any work they did to fit round school or nursery hours' (Gloster et al., 2010), and this is consistent with other research (for example, Ridge and Millar, 2008). Likewise, many respondents in this survey said that they wanted to look after their children themselves, or to limit childcare to family or close friends, when considering barriers to work (see Chapter 5).

At the same time, the survey findings suggest that there may be scope for encouraging more lone parents to use school-based childcare in the future, particularly if awareness can be increased (see below for findings on awareness of after-school and holiday clubs). Interest in using after-school or holiday clubs was strongest among more highly qualified respondents (63 per cent of those qualified to Level 3 or above) and female respondents (49 per cent compared with 31 per cent of male respondents).

Table 4.5 Intentions for future childcare

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>
	%
Shared care between you and your partner in the same household	4
Child's other parent who does not live in the same household	10
Child's grandparents	35
Child's older brother/sister	14
Other relative	20
Friend/neighbour	18
Childminder	22
Babysitter	4
Nanny or au pair	1
Day nursery	4
Playgroup/pre-school	4
Nursery school	3
Special nursery unit for children with Special Educational Needs	1
After-school club or holiday club	48
Other	2
<i>Base: All not currently using childcare but who plan to work in the future</i>	<i>1,126</i>

4.4 Awareness of childcare provided by schools

Respondents who did not use breakfast/after-school clubs were asked if they were aware of these types of childcare. Two in three (66 per cent) said they were aware of them, with awareness lower among:

- lone parents whose first language was not English (39 per cent);
- those with literacy or numeracy problems (47 per cent if more severe problems, 54 if less severe);
- male lone parents (57 per cent);
- those with four or more children (56 per cent);
- those in rural areas (61 per cent);
- respondents that said they did not expect to work in the future (50 per cent).

Respondents who did not currently use a holiday club were also asked if they were aware of this type of childcare. Just 21 per cent said they were aware of it, and again this was lower among respondents whose first language was not English (14 per cent).

Given the interest expressed by lone parents for using these types of childcare in the future (see Section 4.3), these findings suggest that an increase in awareness (particularly for holiday clubs, where awareness is relatively low) may encourage lone parents to make more use of them in the future. The role of holiday clubs is also important as the LPO qualitative research identified a lack of school holiday childcare, describing this as a '*key gap in provision that could limit parents' job prospects*' (Gloster et al., 2010).

4.5 Childcare advice from Jobcentre Plus

The survey explored lone parents' recollections of discussions they'd had about childcare at Jobcentre Plus. Around one in six lone parents who had been in contact with Jobcentre Plus in the last year said they had received advice or help with finding out about local childcare (18 per cent)²⁴. This proportion was very consistent across different sub-groups, although it was lower among those that said they did not expect to work in the future (11 per cent).

The LPO qualitative research also found limited discussion of childcare among lone parents on IS, with Jobcentre Plus staff reporting some inconsistency across different offices (Gloster et al., 2010). The research on the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and related policies for couple parents also noted that '*good quality information and advice about the availability of local childcare and any help towards paying for it was said to be limited*' (Griffiths, 2011a).

Of those that had received this type of advice, three in four (75 per cent) said it was very or fairly useful, as shown in Table 4.7. Respondents were more positive about the advice they received if they had children at secondary school (20 per cent of whom described the advice as 'not useful', compared with 27 per cent of those with only children of primary school age). Respondents were less likely to have found the advice useful if they had a child with a LSI (32 per cent of whom described it as not useful).

²⁴ It should be noted that Jobcentre Plus staff are not allowed to recommend specific childcare providers and so refer people to Family Information Services for more detailed information on local provision.

Table 4.6 Perception of advice or help from Jobcentre Plus in finding out about local childcare

	%
Very helpful	29
Fairly helpful	47
Not very helpful	17
Not at all helpful	8
<i>Base: All respondents who had received advice or help from Jobcentre Plus in finding out about local childcare</i>	<i>464</i>

Those who had received advice from Jobcentre Plus about childcare were similar to other respondents in their use of childcare and attitudes to provision, so there is no evidence from the survey that advice from Jobcentre Plus had changed customers' behaviour or attitudes. However, those that had received advice, but found it unhelpful, tended to be more critical of childcare provision in terms of availability, quality and affordability.

4.6 Attitudes to childcare provision

In the survey, lone parents were asked for their opinions of the availability of childcare in their area, as well as its quality and affordability. These questions were asked of all respondents, so included those who had and hadn't used formal childcare.

In the past decade there has been a considerable decline in the proportion of mothers saying they cannot go out to work due to difficulties in accessing suitable childcare (Smith *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, the absence of suitable childcare remains an issue for parents (for example, La Valle and Smith, 2009), and this is confirmed by respondents in this survey. Thirty per cent of those not currently working said that the lack of suitable, affordable childcare was a big barrier to work, and this figure was almost as high among those who were working (22 per cent) (see Chapter 5).

Respondents were more likely to say there was not enough childcare available in their area (36 per cent), rather than to say the amount was about right (28 per cent). One in three respondents were not able to give an opinion. Those who were currently using childcare were more likely to have an opinion, and to feel that there was not enough childcare available. This applied particularly to those who used some kind of formal childcare (see Table 4.8); this suggests that, although these respondents were able to use formal childcare, they wanted to see more available.

Table 4.7 Perceived number of formal childcare places available in local area

	Column percentages				
	Childcare use				
	Formal only %	Informal only %	Both formal and informal %	No childcare %	Total %
Too many	0	2	3	1	1
About right	31	33	31	26	28
Not enough	42	36	46	34	36
Not sure	28	28	21	39	34
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	179	771	247	1,489	2,779

Lone parents in the survey were more likely to describe the overall quality of childcare in their local area as good (41 per cent), rather than poor (16 per cent), although, as before, a large proportion (43 per cent) did not give a view. In contrast to the findings on availability, those using formal childcare were more positive than other respondents in respect to the quality of childcare (see Table 4.9). Views were also more positive among those who had used formal childcare while working in the past, with 57 per cent describing it as very or fairly good.

Table 4.8 Perception of the quality of childcare in local area

	Column percentages				
	Childcare use				
	Formal only %	Informal only %	Both formal and informal %	No childcare %	Total %
Very/fairly good	60	46	57	35	41
Very/fairly poor	12	16	15	16	16
Not sure	18	38	28	50	43
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	179	771	247	1,489	2,779

As with the perceived quality of local childcare, those who were using formal childcare were more positive than other respondents about the affordability of formal childcare in their area (see Table 4.10). A similar pattern was found in the *Childcare and early years survey of all parents 2009* (Smith et al., 2010). Again, views were also more positive among those that had used formal childcare while working in the past (29 per cent good). Overall, lone parents in this survey were more likely to describe childcare affordability as poor (36 per cent) rather than good (19 per cent), with 46 per cent not giving a view. The LPO qualitative research highlighted concerns from Jobcentre Plus staff that the costs of childcare could not always be met by the financial support for childcare that was currently available, along with evidence of a lack of awareness among lone parents of the financial support available for childcare. Previous research also found that childcare availability and affordability could be a particular concern in school holidays or when children were sick (Ridge and Millar, 2008).

Table 4.9 Perception of affordability of childcare in local area

	Column percentages				
	Childcare use				Total %
	Formal only %	Informal only %	Both formal and informal %	No childcare %	
Very/fairly good	36	18	28	15	19
Very/fairly poor	37	39	44	33	36
Not sure	28	43	28	52	46
<i>Base: All respondents</i>	179	771	247	1,489	2,779

The *Childcare and early years survey of parents 2009* (Smith et al., 2010) included the same three questions on attitudes towards the quality, availability and affordability of childcare. Respondents in the LPO survey were slightly less positive on all three items than lone parents in the population as a whole who were covered by that survey.

In addition to the differences by childcare use (shown in the tables above), attitudes also varied by the following sub-groups:

- Views on the quality and affordability of childcare were more positive among those in work, particularly those working 16 or more hours per week and (in relation to affordability) those receiving WTC; this is linked to the greater use of formal childcare among these respondents.
- Respondents on lower incomes (household income of less than £100 per week) were also more positive on childcare quality and affordability, perhaps indicating that they were able to access free childcare. However, those with financial problems were less positive towards availability and affordability (as noted in Section 2.2.7, financial problems were not necessarily related to income).
- Respondents were more likely to say there was not enough childcare if they lived in rural areas (50 per cent compared with 34 per cent in urban areas). Views on affordability were also less positive in rural areas (45 per cent said this was poor, compared with 35 per cent in urban areas). These figures confirm findings from previous research including the LPO qualitative research, which suggested that '*better childcare provision in more rural areas should be a priority*' (Gloster et al., 2010).
- Lone parents with a child with a LSI were less positive on all three questions, particularly where this restricted the lone parent's ability to work. This again reflects the findings from the LPO qualitative research, which noted a gap in specialised childcare provision for children with disabilities, especially those with learning disabilities and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (Gloster et al., 2010). In addition, respondents who themselves had a LLSI were less positive towards childcare quality and affordability.
- The proportion who said there was not enough childcare available was higher among men (37 per cent compared with 27 per cent of women).

As noted above, a high proportion of respondents (between 34 per cent and 46 per cent on the three questions) were not able to give an opinion. This was higher among those who did not speak English as their first language, those without any formal qualifications, older respondents, those with four or more children, and those who had never worked.

4.7 Childcare preferences

This chapter has included findings on lone parents' use of childcare and their future intentions, as well as their attitudes to formal childcare. In order to consider childcare preferences, we can look at these findings alongside respondents' attitudes to work and employment constraints. These issues are covered in full in the next chapter, but an examination of attitudes and constraints specifically in relation to childcare can help to understand the findings in this chapter more clearly.

As noted in Chapter 5, there was a strong 'parental childcare' focus among lone parents in this survey. The majority of respondents (71 per cent) agreed that 'it's always better if the parent can look after the child themselves' and, when considering barriers to work, 33 per cent said that 'wanting to look after their children themselves at home' was a big barrier. This 'parental childcare' focus applied across the sample, including those who were already using formal childcare. This suggests that those using childcare may sometimes be doing so reluctantly, or only using it to the extent that it does not impact on their time with their children.

At the same time, it is possible to consider childcare preferences alongside current behaviour, by grouping respondents according to current childcare arrangements.

Firstly, the majority of respondents did not use childcare at all (58 per cent of the total sample), and as might be expected, these lone parents were particularly strong in their 'parental childcare' focus. They were more likely than other respondents to agree that 'my job is to look after the home and family' (62 per cent), and were also more likely to disagree that 'children benefit from being looked after by other people' (47 per cent disagreed). This suggests that their current lack of childcare use is likely to stem not just from a lack of need, but also a preference for looking after the children themselves.

Around one in four respondents (27 per cent of the total sample) currently used informal childcare but not formal childcare. One of the main barriers to work for these respondents was that they were only prepared to leave their children with family or close friends when they were working (40 per cent described this as a big barrier to work). This indicates that at least some of these lone parents would be reluctant to use formal childcare when moving into work.

Finally, 16 per cent of all respondents currently used formal childcare of some kind, and the survey indicates that there may be scope to increase this proportion further. Although some respondents appeared reluctant to use formal childcare (as noted above), 48 per cent of those not currently using childcare thought they would use after-school or holiday clubs when they moved into work. While this is a hypothetical question, and so needs to be interpreted with a degree of caution, it does suggest that some lone parents who are not currently using formal childcare would consider doing so in the future.

4.8 Summary

- Two in five lone parents (42 per cent) used childcare of some kind. This was higher among lone parents who were in work (69 per cent), particularly those working 16 or more hours per week (87 per cent), while 39 per cent of those not in work used some form of childcare. Those who were in work and did not use any childcare mostly said that they only worked during school hours.
- Respondents were more likely to use informal rather than formal childcare. Of those that used childcare, 64 per cent used informal childcare only. Use of informal childcare increased with hours worked, from 33 per cent among those not in work, to 54 per cent among those working less than 16 hours per week, and 75 per cent among those working 16 or more hours per week. Use of formal childcare was also higher among those working 16 hours or more per week, but was similar between those working less than 16 hours per week and those not working at all. This reflects the small number of hours worked by many of those working less than 16 hours per week.
- This reliance on informal childcare is not unusual, however. The use of formal and informal childcare among lone parents in this survey (overall, 16 per cent used formal childcare and 36 per cent informal childcare) was broadly similar to lone parents in the population as a whole, and use of formal childcare was also similar to mothers with partners.
- The majority of childcare (in terms of hours) was provided by grandparents and ex-partners. Grandparents were most commonly used for childcare, while ex-partners provided by far the largest number of hours of childcare per week when they were used. There was also a greater likelihood among lone parents in work of using the ex-partner for childcare.
- Breakfast or after-school clubs on school sites were by far the most commonly used type of formal childcare, reflecting the age profile of children covered by the survey (mostly primary-school-age children).
- Around one in four lone parents using childcare paid for at least some of it (24 per cent). This applied to 57 per cent of those using formal childcare, and five per cent using informal childcare. In addition, around half (47 per cent) of those using informal childcare did something in return for at least some of it. This was most common when respondents had help with childcare from friends and neighbours.
- One in four respondents (27 per cent) who had worked since the birth of their oldest child said that their childcare arrangements had broken down at least ‘sometimes’, and ten per cent of the same group said that it was or had been very difficult for them to stay in the job because of childcare arrangements breaking down.
- Respondents not currently using childcare expressed an interest in after-school or holiday clubs for future childcare (when in work). However, awareness of the latter was limited (21 per cent of those not currently using a holiday club were aware of them).
- Only one in six (18 per cent) of those who had contact with Jobcentre Plus in the last year said they had received advice or help with finding out about childcare. Of those that had received this type of advice, three in four (75 per cent) said it was very or fairly useful.
- Respondents were more likely to say that the quality of childcare in their area was good rather than poor (41 per cent compared with 16 per cent). However, around one in three lone parents (36 per cent) said there were not enough childcare places at formal providers, and the same proportion described childcare affordability as poor. Views on childcare were more negative among lone parents with a child with a LSI and in rural areas.

5 Attitudes and constraints to work

Previous research has identified attitudes to work and parenting as being highly influential in lone parents' decision making around entering and sustaining employment. This process has been described in terms of people being guided by their 'moral frameworks' on parenting, work and sense of self (Collins *et al.*, 2006) as well as orientation around work and parental care. For example, Bell *et al.* (2005) have contended that lone parents can be roughly categorised as having either a high or a lower orientation towards work and towards parental childcare.

Recent analysis of longitudinal survey data found that attitudes and work intentions were directly and indirectly linked to the likelihood of lone mothers moving into work (Tomaszewski *et al.*, 2010). In order to measure the attitudes, intentions and perceived employment constraints and barriers of lone parents on Income Support (IS) prior to Lone Parent Obligations (LPO), the Families and Children's Study (FACS) 'Choices and Constraints' question set was asked of all respondents in this survey. This chapter builds on current evidence by providing more detailed information on the attitudes and intentions of lone parents on IS, before moving on to look at perceived barriers to employment. The findings reported here have important implications for those lone parents who will move onto Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and the Work Programme in the future and be required to look for work.

To put these findings in context, the chapter starts by setting out respondents' position in relation to the labour market: whether they were in work, looking for work or expecting to work in the future.

The 'Choices and Constraints' question set

Since 2006 the FACS has included a set of questions referred to as the 'Choices and Constraints' question set (Collins *et al.*, 2006). This set of questions comprises three sections:

- self-completion questions on attitudes towards parenting, childcare, work and related issues;
- questions about future intentions including the kind of work they may want to do in the future;
- a card sort exercise in which respondents sort a series of statements by whether they perceive them to be a 'big factor', a 'smaller factor' or 'not a factor' in their decision to work.

Key findings from this question set, as asked of LPO respondents, are reported in this chapter. Using this question set also enabled comparison of lone parents in this survey with a wider group of lone and couple parents from FACS.

5.1 Distance from the labour market

As noted in Section 3.1, ten per cent of lone parents were in work at the time of the survey. Of the remainder, the majority were either looking for work or said that they thought they would look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) in the future. Overall, just nine per cent did not expect to look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) in the future. These findings are summarised in Figure 5.1.

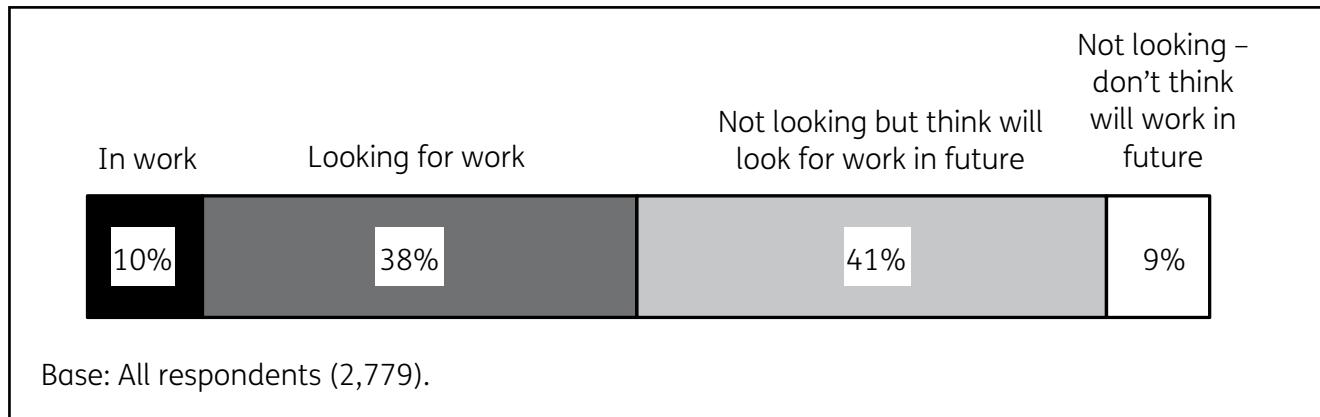
Figure 5.1 Distance from the labour market

Table 5.1 shows how the proportion working or looking for work varied by particular sub-groups. This shows that:

- respondents with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity that limits activities (LLSI) were less likely to be looking for work (25 per cent), particularly those with a mental health problem (23 per cent). Those with a LLSI were also more likely not to expect to work (16 hours or more per week) in the future;
- those with more children were also less likely to be looking for work, as were those with a youngest child aged under six.

There was a link between previous work experience and current intentions. Respondents who were looking for work were more likely to have had recent work experience, while those that had never worked were more likely than average to think they would not work (16 hours or more per week) in the future.

Table 5.1 Distance from labour market, by sub-group

					Row percentages
	In work %	Looking for work %	Not looking but think will look for work in future %	Not looking, don't think will work in future %	<i>Base: All respondents</i>
Total	10	38	41	9	2,779
LLSI					
Yes	5	25	50	17	611
No	12	42	39	7	2,168
Number of children					
1	12	46	33	7	903
2	10	36	43	9	1,054
3	8	33	47	11	544
4+	7	26	51	15	274
Youngest child under 6					
Yes	5	17	62	15	319
No	11	41	39	9	2,460
Recent work experience (those not in work)					
Worked since birth of oldest child	0	51	42	6	1,064
Not worked since birth of oldest child (but have worked in past)	0	41	48	9	776
Never worked	0	31	49	19	627

In addition to the sub-groups highlighted in Table 5.1, lone parents on a lower income were more likely to be looking for work (47 per cent of those with a household income of less than £100 per week were looking for work), while those with no formal qualifications were less likely to be looking for work (33 per cent).

The proportion who did not expect to work 16 hours or more per week in the future was higher among older respondents (18 per cent) and those who did not speak English as their first language (20 per cent).

The characteristics of respondents who were in work at the time of the survey are described in Section 3.4. Overall, the analysis indicates that a number of groups were less likely to be in work or looking for work: those with a LLSI, those with no formal qualifications and those with a youngest child under six. These groups, along with those that had never worked, can be considered those who were furthest from the labour market at the time of the survey. By contrast, recent work experience appears to be the main factor positively associated with looking for work.

Overall, these findings confirm that lone parents affected by LPO vary considerably in terms of their distance from the labour market. Previous research has found that work focused interventions, such as lone parent Work Focused Interviews and the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents pilots, tend to be most effective for those who are most job-ready (Thomas, 2007; Hosain and Breen, 2007), and it seems likely that these lone parents will also be most receptive to the JSA regime. At the same time,

it will be a challenge for the JSA regime to provide the support required by those who are further from the labour market.

With this in mind it is worth considering when respondents expected to look for work of 16 hours or more per week (if they were not already doing so). Among those who thought that they would look for work in the future, 30 per cent expected to look for work in the next few months, while 30 per cent said it would be in a year or two, and 40 per cent were not sure (they said it would be some time in the future)²⁵. Overall, this means that 40 per cent of the total sample did not expect to look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) for at least a year or so²⁶; that is, after the time their eligibility for IS was due to end and they would need to start claiming JSA. This includes some respondents who were already working at the time of the survey (22 per cent of those working less than 16 hours per week did not expect to increase their hours within the next year). The conclusions chapter (Chapter 8) considers the implications of these findings for the JSA regime.

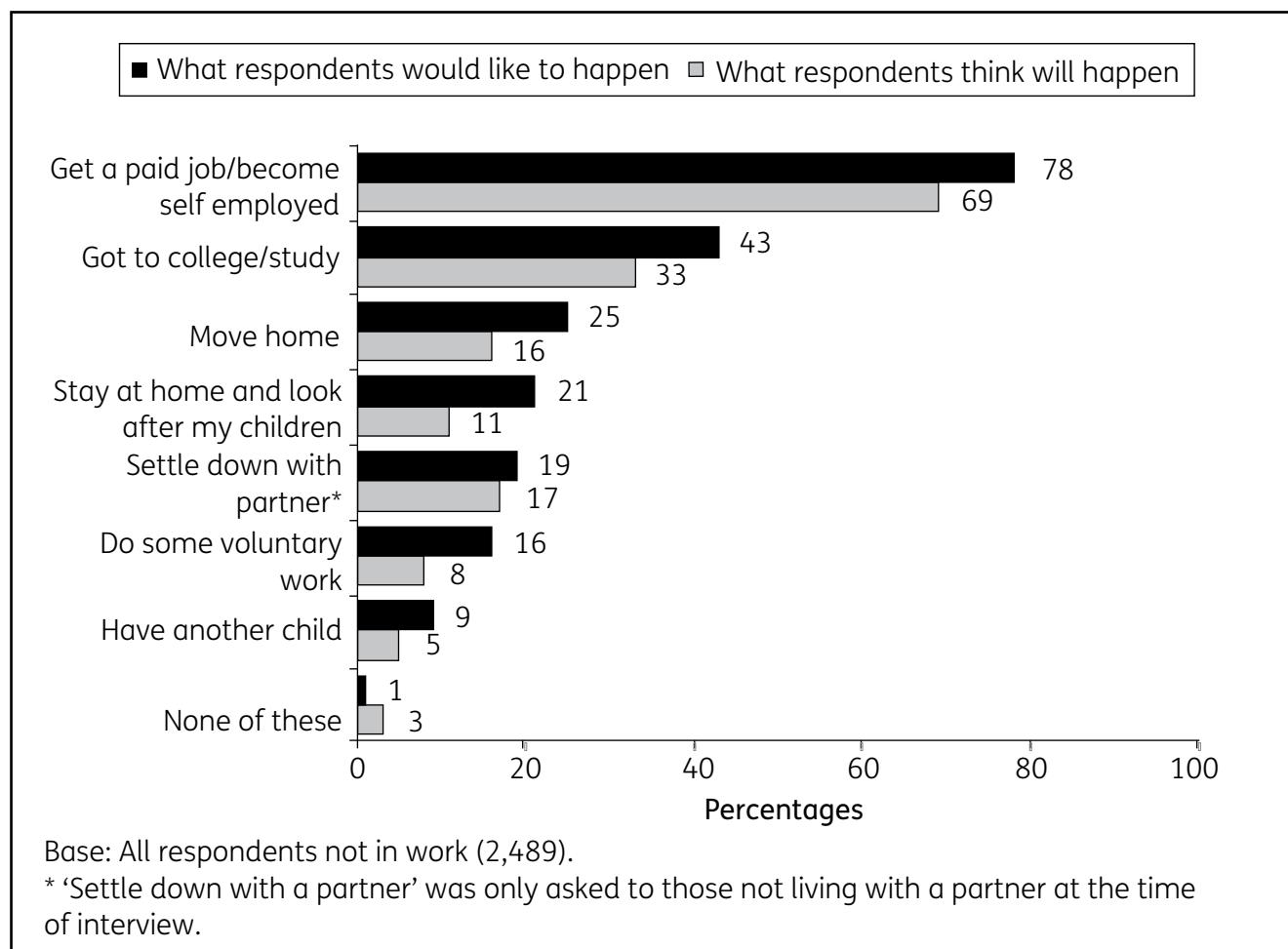
5.2 Future intentions

Reflecting the findings in the previous section, the majority of lone parents not in work said they wanted to work in the next few years (78 per cent), and most thought they would in fact do so (69 per cent). Nearly one in ten respondents thought they would do some voluntary work in the next few years and three in ten thought they would go to college (see Figure 5.2). On the whole this suggests that this group of lone parents, most of whose youngest child had been in full-time education for over a year, was quite focused on moving into work or taking steps towards this.

²⁵ The survey of lone parents on IS carried out as part of the New Deal for Lone Parents evaluation found a similarly wide range in terms of lone parents' future intentions.

²⁶ Comprising nine per cent who did not think they would look for work in the future at all, 13 per cent who thought they would look for work in a year or two, and 17 per cent who thought they would look for work 'sometime in the future'.

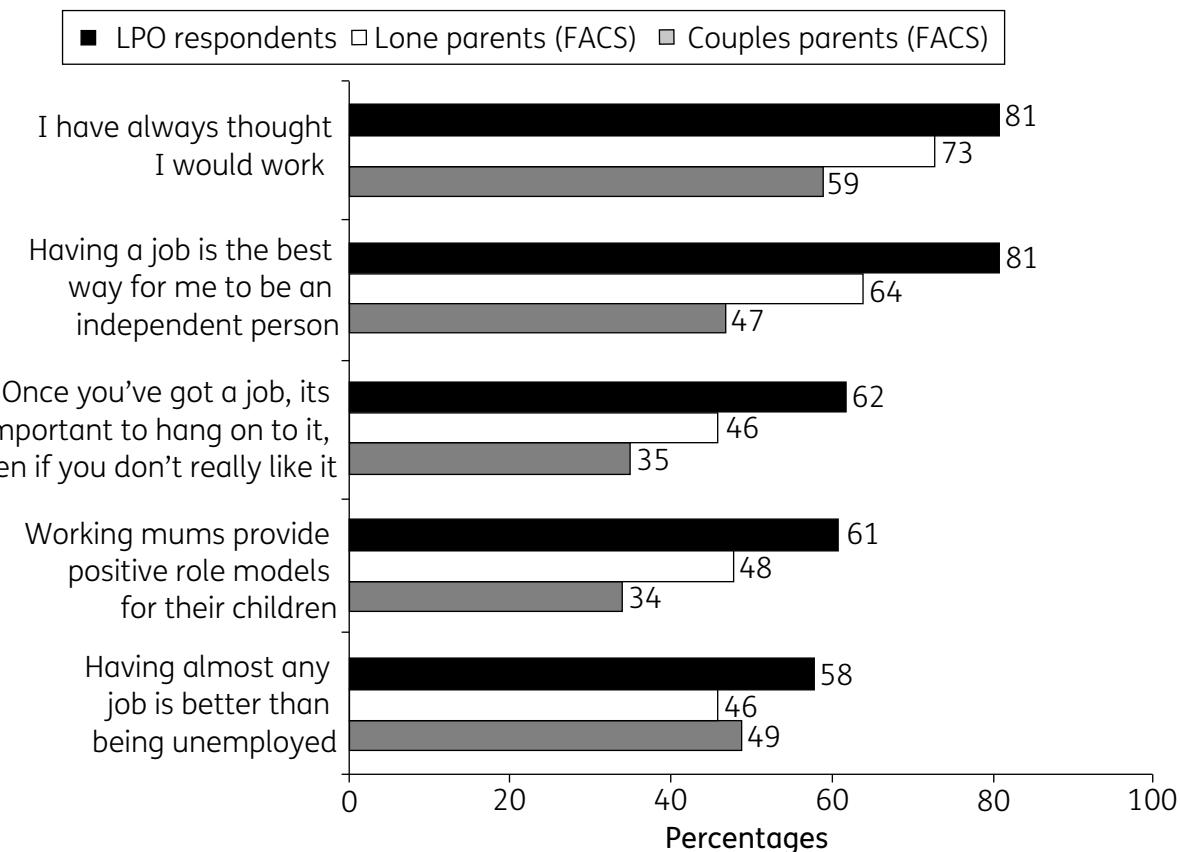
Figure 5.2 Lone parents' views on what they want to happen in the next few years and what they think will happen



5.3 Attitudes towards work, parenting and childcare

Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards parenting, work and childcare through a series of 27 agreement statements. The majority of respondents were both very work focused and also focused on looking after their children. For example, four in five (82 per cent) agreed that 'having a job is the best way for me to be an independent person', while a high proportion (72 per cent) also agreed that 'it is always better if the parent can look after the child themselves' (see Table A.17 for full details). Overall, their attitudes towards parenting and childcare were similar to other lone parents and mothers with partners. However, respondents were more likely to agree with employment-focused statements compared with other lone parents and mothers with partners.²⁷ This can be seen in Figure 5.3.

²⁷ Comparisons between this group of lone parents and FACS respondents are intended to be indicative only; see Introduction, Section 1.4 for general guidance on the comparisons with FACS data.

Figure 5.3 Agreement with employment focused statements

Bases: All respondents (LPO respondents 2,744; Wave 10 FACS lone parents 782; Wave 10 FACS mothers with partners 1,294).

Note: Percentages are the proportion who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement.

It is not possible to say for certain why this group of lone parents on IS were more employment focused than the wider population of lone parents but it may in part be due to the work of Jobcentre Plus staff making this group of lone parents aware of the LPOs in advance of their IS eligibility ending. Quarterly Work Focused Interviews would have recently started for this group of lone parents as they were in the last year of their IS eligibility at the time of the survey (see Chapter 6 for further discussion of respondents' relationships with Jobcentre Plus).

Factor analysis was conducted to reduce the 27 attitude statements about parenting, work and childcare down to a smaller number of components. This was done to aid analysis and interpretation of the relatively complex data derived from the choices and constraints questions (see Appendix B for further details of how the factor analysis was carried out). The results revealed that attitudes towards parenting, childcare and work could be summarised as the following interrelated factors:

- parental childcare-focused attitudes;
- employment-focused attitudes;
- social stigma of staying at home;
- motivation towards combining work and parenting.

As may be expected, respondents with shorter benefit histories (on IS for less than one year) and those who were looking for work at the time of the survey were more likely to agree with employment-focused attitude statements and statements reflecting a motivation to balance work and parenting. Respondents with a LLSI, particularly limiting mental health problems, were more likely to agree with statements that reflected the social stigma associated with staying at home and not working, as were those with children with a disability and respondents with financial problems.

Overall, the majority of respondents agreed with statements related to the perceived benefits of parents looking after their children, such as 'children under five are happiest being looked after by their parents' (78 per cent agreed) and 'it's always better if the parent can look after the child themselves' (71 per cent agreed). As mentioned above, this was in line with other lone parents and mothers with partners. However, some groups of respondents were more likely to agree with these 'parental childcare-focused' statements than others. These were generally respondents who had not worked for some time, those with no or low qualifications and with no expectations to work in the future. In particular, respondents who were more likely to agree with 'parental childcare-focused' statements included those who:

- had never worked and/or had been on benefits longer than other respondents (for five years or more);
- had four or more children;
- had no or low qualifications (including those with Level 1 and entry-level qualifications), had literacy or numeracy problems and for whom English was not their first language;
- were not looking for work and did not expect to work in the future.

These sub-groups can all be considered to be more distant from the labour market (as noted in Section 5.1) and this raises an interesting issue as to the relationship between respondents' characteristics and their attitudes. A recent report examining FACS data for lone parents suggested that long-term absence from work can lead to '*lone mothers increasingly treating parenting as their job, perhaps because this is how they start to rationalise, or justify, their inability to move into formal employment*' (Tomaszewski et al., 2010).

5.4 Perceived barriers to employment

Understanding how constraints and barriers to employment are perceived is important in order to successfully support lone parents' journeys into work. Respondents not in work undertook a card sort exercise in which they sorted a series of statements by whether they perceive them to be a 'big factor', a 'smaller factor' or 'not a factor' in their decision to work. Respondents reported multiple barriers to employment, with 98 per cent of those not in work reporting two or more barriers to employment and an average (mean) of ten out of 19 barriers reported per respondent.²⁸ The most common barrier to employment was the need for a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their child(ren) (64 per cent of respondents reported this as a big barrier to employment, with a further 24 per cent reporting it as a small barrier; see Table 5.1). This desire to find work that fits with their childcare responsibilities was also reflected by respondents generally wanting part-time work and to work within school hours, as discussed in Chapter 7.

²⁸ This was in line with the wider population of lone parents, in which 97 per cent reported two or more barriers to employment with an average (mean) of nine out of 19 barriers to employment per lone parent (FACS 2008). This comparison is for illustrative purposes only and should be treated with caution as the two sets of findings are not directly comparable. FACS 2008 data excludes those who did not intend to work in the future, which accounted for 12 per cent of LPO respondents who undertook this card sort exercise.

Factor analysis was carried out to reduce the 19 barriers to employment statements into a smaller number of factors (see Appendix B for further details of how the factor analysis was carried out). The results revealed that the barriers could be meaningfully summarised as the following five factors:

- childcare constraints (comprising the individual barriers listed in Table 5.2);
- personal constraints (see Table 5.3);
- ‘parenting as a choice’ (see Table 5.4);
- job concerns (see Table 5.5);
- peer pressure (see Table 5.6).

There were specific groups of respondents for whom certain barriers to employment were more likely to be perceived as an issue. This is discussed for each factor below, but overall differences can best be summarised in relation to distance from the labour market, by comparing those looking for work; those not looking for work but expecting to do so in the future; and those not expecting to look for work in the future. The key points are as follows (detailed findings are shown in Table A.19):

- Lone parents who were looking for work were as likely as other respondents to report childcare constraints as large barriers to work (for example, 60 per cent said they would need a job where they could take time off at short notice). However, these respondents were less likely than others to report personal constraints, such as health problems or caring responsibilities, or constraints relating to ‘parenting as a choice’. For example, only seven per cent reported that having a health condition or disability was a big barrier. Similarly, only nine per cent reported that caring for someone with a health condition or disability was a big barrier to employment. Overall, this indicates that lone parents looking for work were more focused on practical issues relating to appropriate types of work and childcare, as opposed to more personal issues.
- Those who were not looking for work but expected to do so in the future were less concerned about the availability of suitable job opportunities than those who were actually looking for work, but were more likely to report personal constraints and constraints relating to ‘parenting as a choice’. As noted above in Section 5.1, these respondents often did not expect to work for some time, and the findings here confirm that they feel they have a number of barriers to work and are reluctant to compromise on their commitment to their children.
- lone parents not expecting to work in the future were more likely to report multiple big barriers to employment than those looking or expecting to work in the future. In particular, they were more likely to report job concerns (such as a lack of qualifications or experience, and concern over the financial benefits of work), personal constraints and constraints relating to ‘parenting as a choice’, compared with other lone parents.

5.4.1 Childcare constraints

The need to take time off from a job at short notice to look after their child(ren) was perceived by the majority of respondents (64 per cent) to be a big barrier to employment (see Table 5.2).²⁹ Overall, childcare-related barriers were important to lone parents, with several childcare-related barriers being perceived as a big barrier for over 25 per cent of lone parents.

²⁹ See Table A.18 for all perceived barriers to employment.

Table 5.2 Perceived childcare-related barriers to employment

				Row percentages
	Big barrier	Small barrier	Not a barrier	Base: All respondents not in work ¹
I would need a job where I could take time off at short notice to look after my child(ren)	64	24	12	2,357
There are few suitable job opportunities in the local area	45	32	23	2,351
My family or close friends are not able, or live too far away, to provide childcare	36	21	43	2,357
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	30	29	41	2,345
Employers aren't very family-friendly	25	35	40	2,344
I would have problems with transport to and from work	19	28	53	2,367

¹ Bases are all respondents not in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know' (<1%).

Respondents with a dependent child with a disability and those living in rural areas were more likely to report childcare-related barriers to employment. Respondents with a long-standing illness or disability (LSI) were also more likely to perceive childcare-related barriers to employment as were those with financial problems.³⁰ Gaps in childcare provision for children with special needs, such as those with a disability and/or behavioural difficulties, and limited availability in rural areas, have also been found in other lone parent research including the LPO Early Findings research (Gloster *et al.* 2010). This is also reflected in attitudes to childcare availability in this survey (see Section 4.6).

5.4.2 Personal constraints

Personal constraints to employment included having personal or family troubles, health problems or caring responsibilities for someone with a health condition or disability (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Personal constraints

				Row percentages
	Big barrier	Small barrier	Not a barrier	Base: All respondents not in work ¹
I have personal or family troubles that need to be sorted out	19	18	64	2,362
I have difficulties due to my health condition or disability	14	9	77	2,364
I care for someone who has a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulties	12	7	81	2,361

¹ Bases are all respondents not in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know' (<1%).

³⁰ Financial problems relate to respondents who reported finding it quite or very difficult to manage financially, never having money left over at the end of the week and having trouble with debts almost all of the time.

Older respondents and those with caring responsibilities were more likely to perceive personal constraints as a barrier to employment. In particular, this was more likely to be reported as a barrier by respondents:

- with a dependent child with a disability;
- whose child has a statement of a Special Educational Need;
- who care for someone other than a child because they have a LSI of any kind;
- with older children at secondary school or sixth form college;
- older respondents aged 40 and over;
- with financial problems.

As noted above, personal constraints were also more likely to be reported by those further from the labour market, increasing among those not looking for work and in particular those who did not expect to work in the future.

As shown in Table 5.3, 14 per cent said that difficulties due to a health condition or disability represented a big barrier to work. Although this proportion is smaller than for some of the other barriers (for example, several of the childcare barriers are seen as a big barrier by 25 per cent or more), those with a health problem or disability were also likely to mention other barriers such as those relating to childcare and job concerns. This reflects previous evidence suggesting that health problems, while not always a key constraint to work for lone parents on IS, can add to, and interact with, other constraints (Casebourne and Britton, 2004).

5.4.3 Parenting as a choice

'Parenting as a choice' summarises views related to wanting to look after their children themselves at home, not wanting to use formal childcare and concern about not having enough time with their children if they worked (see Table 5.4)

Table 5.4 Parenting as a choice

	Big barrier	Small barrier	Not a barrier	Row percentages
				Base: All respondents not in work ¹
I am not prepared to leave my child(ren) in the care of anyone other than my family or close friends while I work	37	23	41	2,360
I am worried I will not have enough time with my child(ren)	35	36	29	2,362
I want to look after my child(ren) myself or at home	33	33	35	2,361
My child(ren) wouldn't like me to work	15	23	62	2,362

¹ Bases are all respondents not in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know' (<1%).

Respondents were more likely to perceive 'parenting as a choice' as a barrier to employment if they had a child with a disability, had never worked, had no or low qualifications (Level 1 or entry level) and had literacy or numeracy problems. Respondents with long IS claims, such as claims of five years or longer, and those not looking for work and/or who did not expect to work in the future

were also more likely to report ‘parenting as a choice’ as a barrier to employment. These groups of respondents, except those with a child with a disability, were also more likely to report job concerns as a barrier to employment. This is discussed further in Section 5.4.4 – Job concerns.

This analysis indicates that, while the majority of respondents want to work, there is a group that is committed to looking after their children, and for now at least do not see work as an option for them. This same group also face other barriers, such as low skills and lack of previous work experience, that further distance them from a likely move into work. This group is likely to represent the greatest challenge to the JSA regime in the future. This issue is discussed further in the Conclusions chapter (Chapter 8).

5.4.4 Job concerns

A lack of qualifications or experience necessary for the type of job respondents wanted was one of the more common barriers to employment and was a ‘big barrier’ for two in five respondents. Other job related constraints included being concerned about leaving the security of benefits, low confidence and uncertainty over the financial benefit of working (see Table 5.5).

Table 5.5 Job concerns

	Big barrier	Small barrier	Not a barrier	<i>Row percentages</i>
				<i>Base: All respondents not in work¹</i>
I haven't got the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job I would want	41	27	32	2,362
I am not sure I would be financially better off in work	40	34	26	2,358
My confidence is low at the moment	28	27	45	2,367
I am concerned about leaving the security of benefits	19	32	49	2,365

¹ Bases are all respondents not in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered ‘don’t know’ (<1%).

Respondents more likely to report job concerns were similar groups of lone parents who also reported ‘parenting as a choice’ as a barrier to employment. In particular this was:

- respondents with a LLSI, particularly mental health problems;
- respondents who had never worked;
- had no or low qualifications (Level 1 or entry level);
- had literacy or numeracy problems;
- respondents with long IS claims (five years or longer);
- those not looking for work who did not expect to work in the future.

These findings reflect previous evidence, in which lack of experience, skills, qualifications and confidence are commonly cited constraints in the wider literature. For example, Hasluck and Green (2007) cite them as common constraints for lone parents, especially for those who have had long periods out of work.

5.4.5 Peer pressure

'Peer pressure', such as the respondents' parents, partners or ex-partners not wanting them to work, was not a barrier to employment for the vast majority of respondents (see Table 5.6). However, respondents with no qualifications and those with literacy or numeracy problems were more likely to report peer pressure as a small barrier to employment compared with other respondents.

Table 5.6 Peer pressure

	Big barrier	Small barrier	Not a barrier	Row percentages
				Base: All respondents not in work ¹
My parent(s) wouldn't like it if I worked	3	6	91	2,360
My husband/partner/ex-partner would not like it if I worked	2	2	96	2,357

¹ Bases are all respondents not in work, excluding those who did not answer or answered 'don't know' (<1%).

5.4.6 Other priorities

The minority of respondents (11 per cent) who did not want or expect to return to work, and had not thought about returning to work in the last 12 months, were asked about their priorities for the next few years. Staying at home to bring up their children was a priority for most of this group of respondents (79 per cent reported this as a priority). This confirms the strong emphasis on the 'parenting as choice' constraints for these respondents, as previously described.

Table 5.7 Priorities for respondents not expecting to work in next few years

Priorities	%
Stay at home to bring up my children	79
Getting some (more) qualifications	34
Managing my own health condition/disability	27
Building my self-confidence	12
Doing some voluntary work	13
Building/maintaining a good relationship with my family	14
Getting somewhere permanent to live	7
Looking after a sick or disabled child	7
Sorting out custody/access issues for my child(ren)	6
Looking after a sick, disabled or elderly family member or friend	6
Emotionally coming to terms with the break-up of my relationship	4
Sorting out financial issues resulting from the break-up of my relationship	4
Managing my drug or alcohol problems	2
None	2

Base: All respondents not expecting or wanting to work in the next few years 272

5.5 Respondents in work

Lone parents in work also undertook a card sort exercise in which they sorted a series of statements by whether they perceive them to be a ‘big factor’, a ‘smaller factor’ or ‘not a factor’ in their ability to stay in work. Previous research has found that ‘*the barriers to employment that make it difficult for many lone parents and long-term unemployed people to enter work do not disappear when they get a job. Some persist or recur*’ (Hoggart et al., 2006). A number of factors were found to affect lone parents’ ability to stay in work in this survey. In particular the following were most commonly given as big factors (see Table A.20 for full details):

- financial concerns about being better off in work (26 per cent reported this as a big factor);
- a lack of suitable, affordable childcare (22 per cent). This indicates that although respondents in work were more positive towards childcare provision than those not working (as noted in Section 4.6), this remained an important issue for working lone parents;
- unanticipated in-work costs (20 per cent).

These factors were not the same as the most common barriers to employment cited by those not in work. There was a greater emphasis among those in work on combining work with family and on financial concerns, compared with those not in work.

Despite these barriers the majority of working respondents (77 per cent) thought it was easy for them to stay in the job they were doing, with 40 per cent saying it was very easy. Most respondents in work also thought it either likely (50 per cent) or very likely (20 per cent) that they would get another job if their current job fell through.

5.6 Summary

- Ten per cent of respondents were in work at the time of the survey and a further 38 per cent were looking for work. Of the remainder, most expected to look for work (of 16 or more hours per week) in the future, although many said this would be in a year or two (30 per cent) or were not sure when it would be (40 per cent). Overall, nine per cent of lone parents in the survey did not expect to look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) in the future.
- Recent work experience was a key factor in lone parents’ distance from the labour market. The other factors affecting whether lone parents were looking for work or expected to do so in the future were the number of children, incidence of LLSI and qualifications.
- Lone parents were very employment focused; the majority (78 per cent) reported wanting to work and 69 per cent thought they would work in the next few years. There were also high levels of agreement to pro-work attitude statements.
- Attitudes towards parenting were broadly similar to the attitudes of other lone parents and mothers with partners. However, respondents who had not worked for a long time and those with no or low-level qualifications were more likely to want to look after their children themselves, as were those who did not expect to work in the future. This suggests that while most lone parents want to work, the balance between work and family is critical and that this can be a major barrier when combined with other problems such as lack of qualifications and experience. This is likely to have implications for lone parents who will move onto JSA and possibly the Work Programme in the future.

- Respondents reported multiple barriers to employment, with 98 per cent of those not in work reporting two or more barriers to employment. The most common barrier to employment was the need for a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their child(ren) (64 per cent of respondents reported this as a big barrier to employment, with a further 24 per cent reporting it as a small barrier).
- Lone parents looking for work were more focused on practical issues relating to appropriate types of work and childcare, as opposed to more personal issues. In particular, lone parents who were looking for work were as likely as other respondents to report childcare constraints as large barriers to work. However, these respondents were less likely than others to report personal constraints, such as health problems or caring responsibilities, or constraints relating to 'parenting as a choice'.
- Some groups of respondents were more likely to perceive certain issues as barriers to employment than others and this was often related to their personal circumstances. For example, childcare-related constraints were more likely to be reported as barriers to employment by respondents with a child with a disability, those living in rural areas, those with a disability and those with financial problems. This further highlights the diversity of needs and constraints of lone parents affected by LPO.
- Once in work the factors that affect lone parents' ability to stay in work were not the same as those reported as barriers to entering employment. In particular, concern over not being financially better off in work, unanticipated in-work costs and childcare concerns were the most commonly cited big factors affecting lone parents in work.

6 Relationship with Jobcentre Plus

Respondents in this survey were sampled on the basis that they were receiving Income Support (IS) a few months before they were interviewed and the vast majority were still receiving IS at the time of the interview. IS is an income-related benefit with few conditions on the customer to remain entitled. There is no underlying requirement for customers to look for or take up work, nor currently to engage in work-related activity to prepare for work as a condition of receipt of IS. However, as a way of engaging with lone parents on benefits, it became a requirement from April 2001 to participate in lone parent Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) as part of making a claim for IS. From April 2008, lone parents who attended WFIs on an annual basis were now required to attend a WFI once every six months. For lone parents in their final year of IS eligibility, as their youngest child is nearing the Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) threshold, there is a requirement to attend Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs). Survey interviews took place at the early to mid-point of that final year, so respondents in the sample should have moved to QWFIs by that time.

This chapter looks at lone parents' experiences of Jobcentre Plus while claiming IS, in the period six to eight months before they were due to move to Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or other destinations. It focused on:

- prior level of contact with Jobcentre Plus;
- types of support received;
- level of personalised support;
- overall perceptions of the service provided by Jobcentre Plus.

These findings can help to identify aspects of the service that lone parents feel could be improved, as well as assessing the groups of customers who are more or less receptive to the type of support offered by the IS regime. This in turn provides pointers for service delivery for lone parents on JSA.

6.1 Recent contact

In total, eight per cent of respondents said they had not had any contact with Jobcentre Plus (face to face or by phone) over the previous 12 months, despite claiming IS.³¹ These respondents are excluded from most of the questions in this chapter (they are only included where specified below). Otherwise, the majority of lone parents recalled attending either three or four meetings in the previous 12 months (40 per cent), or just one or two (50 per cent). These figures are consistent with a recent move from six-monthly to QWFIs, given that it is likely that some lone parents would have attended other meetings in addition to WFIs, while some may have failed to attend scheduled WFIs.

³¹ The eight per cent of lone parents who said they had had no contact with Jobcentre Plus may have had contact with other brokers or advisors working on behalf of Jobcentre Plus, for example via Employment Zones. Others may have accessed support via children's centres without being aware that the adviser worked for Jobcentre Plus. Others may have received deferrals or waivers.

6.2 Advice and support

6.2.1 Types of support provided

Table 6.1 shows the types of advice or support which lone parents said they had received in the previous 12 months. As the table indicates, work-related activities were more likely to be mentioned by those who were looking for work at the time of interview. The same applied to respondents who had been on New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), as well as those who had more recent contact with Jobcentre Plus.

Table 6.1 Types of advice or support received in the previous 12 months

	Column percentages				
	Work status				
	Total %	In work %	Looking for work %	Not looking but expect to work in future %	Don't expect to work in future %
Making a benefits claim	15	19	11	17	19
Looking at job vacancies	34	43	52	19	14
Applying for a job, for example, help with CV, job application or preparation for interview	16	18	23	11	7
Looking at the sort of work you might do	45	46	53	41	25
Helping you to stay in work or to progress in your job	3	11	3	2	1
Finding out about local childcare	18	16	21	16	11
Looking or applying for education or training courses	28	27	27	31	25
Looking for voluntary work	6	3	6	8	5
Setting up your own business	3	6	3	3	3
Some other type of help (specify)	4				
(None of the above)	22	18	15	25	37
Received Better Off Calculation (BOC)	66	77	75	61	41
<i>Base: All with contact with Jobcentre Plus in previous 12 months</i>	2,567	289	1,067	1,016	195

The LPO qualitative research looked at the role and content of WFIs. It found limited evidence that the increased WFI frequency provided a greater focus on work. Overall, it was felt by Jobcentre Plus staff that the effectiveness of the regime depended on the individual customer and their attitude to work. There was also evidence to suggest that the level and quality of support offered by different advisers can vary considerably. However, Jobcentre Plus staff suggested that the increased frequency of WFIs to quarterly in the final year of IS eligibility was beneficial in promoting customer awareness and understanding of LPO (Gloster et al., 2010).

6.2.2 New Deal for Lone Parents

One in ten lone parents in the survey (ten per cent) said that they had been on NDLP at some point, and five per cent said they were on NDLP at the time of the survey. Administrative data suggests that a much higher proportion of lone parents had participated in NDLP (nearly half). A similar pattern was identified in the evaluation of lone parent WFIs, in which '*knowledge of NDLP among many clients was low, and clients were often unaware of their status on the NDLP programme*' (Thomas, 2007). This was also apparent in the LPO qualitative research (Gloster et al., 2010). At the same time, administrative data may record a customer as having started NDLP, without the customer having (from their own perspective) undertaken any tangible, additional activities (Coleman et al., 2003). In this report, analysis of lone parents participating in NDLP is based on respondents' perceptions, rather than administrative data, as this is more likely to reflect actual involvement from the customer's perspective.

Lone parents who said they had been on NDLP were more likely than other respondents to have been referred to external support: 24 per cent had been referred to a careers adviser in the previous 12 months (compared with 15 per cent of respondents overall), and 27 per cent had been referred to an external provider (nine per cent overall).

6.2.3 Jobsearch advice

Lone parents who had been looking for work in the last year were asked about the advice they had received in looking for work. Respondents were more likely to say they were advised to hold out for a better job (17 per cent) rather than take the first job that came along (11 per cent), although the majority said they did not get this type of advice (see Table 6.2). Men were more likely than women to say they were told to take the first job that came along (21 per cent compared with 11 per cent), and those on a low income (less than £100 per week) were also more likely than other respondents to say they were told to take the first job. Those with experience of NDLP were more likely to say that they were told to hold out for the right job (30 per cent).

When asked about the encouragement they received from Jobcentre Plus staff to get a job that was right for them, respondents were evenly split between saying they had a lot of encouragement, some encouragement, or little or no encouragement. Table 6.2 provides details. Those who were closer to the labour market were more likely to say they had a lot of encouragement, specifically those who had recently started a job, and those who had been on NDLP. By contrast, there were less positive views among those with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity that limits activities (LLSI), those whose ability to work was restricted by a child with a long-standing illness or disability (LSI), and those who reported financial problems.

Table 6.2 Advice in looking for work

	%
Did staff at Jobcentre Plus advise you to ...	
... take the first job that came along	11
... hold out for a better job	17
Or did they not offer any advice on this?	70
Don't know	2
Did Jobcentre Plus staff give you ...	
... a lot of encouragement to get a job you felt was right for you	31
... some encouragement	38
Or did they offer little or no encouragement?	31
Don't know	1
<i>Base: All looking for work in previous 12 months</i>	<i>1,067</i>

The same two questions were asked in the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) evaluation. Although, as suggested earlier, the respondent groups are not directly comparable (the timing of the surveys differed with ERA taking place when lone parent WFIs were still either annual or six-monthly), a comparison can still give a broad context for interpreting the LPO findings. Respondents in ERA were more likely than those in the LPO survey to say they had been told to hold out for a better job.³² At the same time the two sets of findings were similar in terms of the level of encouragement they received. These comparisons suggest that lone parents on LPO are sometimes directed towards the first job available, and that this may be happening to a greater extent than has happened with other lone parents.³³

6.2.4 Personalised support

The LPO qualitative research found that lone parents much preferred having a designated adviser when they went to a Jobcentre Plus office. This, they said, allowed them to build up a relationship with that person and put them at ease. By contrast, customers who reported seeing a different adviser each time they attended a meeting found this frustrating. Similarly, building a rapport with customers was seen by Jobcentre Plus staff as being an essential part of gaining a customer's trust and commitment. This corresponds with previous research, including the evaluation of lone parent WFIs (Thomas, 2007).

Around two in five lone parents (43 per cent) said that there was a particular person at Jobcentre Plus that they try to speak to. This was higher among those with more recent contact with Jobcentre Plus (including those on NDLP and those who had recently left IS to start a job), and increased with higher qualifications (ranging from 35 per cent of those with no formal qualifications to 53 per cent of those qualified to Level 4 or above). It was also higher in rural areas (59 per cent).

³² Taken from the ERA 12-month customer survey fielded in 2005. The difference applies when comparing any of the ERA treatment and control groups with either the full LPO sample or just those that had been on NDLP.

³³ The ERA evaluation covered lone parents on NDLP, as well as those receiving Working Tax Credit.

Where they did try to speak to a particular person, most respondents said that this member of Jobcentre Plus staff made a lot of effort or some effort to get to know them (see Table 6.3). Most respondents also said that this person gave them the support they needed (82 per cent); this was particularly high among those who had contacted a particular person while they were in work (88 per cent).

Again, these questions were asked in the ERA evaluation. The figures in ERA were higher in terms of speaking to a particular person and in the effort made to get to know them³⁴. Although the surveys are not directly comparable it does suggest that lone parents in the LPO survey were not always getting a high level of individualised support.

Overall, one of the key messages from both the United Kingdom and the United States (US) ERA is the need for highly skilled advisers with career and local labour market expertise. These advisers are best placed to connect training to specific job opportunities and career advancement.

Table 6.3 Perceived effort made by Jobcentre Plus staff to get to know respondent

	%
A lot of effort	56
Some effort	32
Little or no effort	11
Don't know	1
<i>Base: All who said they try to speak to a particular person at Jobcentre Plus</i>	<i>1,103</i>

All those respondents who had been in contact with Jobcentre Plus in the previous year were asked whether they felt the advice they had received had taken their individual circumstances into account. As shown in Table 6.4, most respondents thought that their circumstances had been taken into account, but one in four (27 per cent) did not. Two groups were less likely to feel their circumstances were taken into account: those qualified to Level 4 or above, and those with a LLSI, particularly lone parents with both mental health and physical problems. These groups were also critical of other aspects of the Jobcentre Plus service, as described in Section 6.5.

Table 6.4 Whether individual circumstances were taken into account by Jobcentre Plus staff

	%
Yes	63
No	27
Hard to say	9
Had not had any help or advice	1
<i>Base: All with contact with Jobcentre Plus in previous 12 months</i>	<i>2,567</i>

³⁴ See Dorsett et al. (2007), Sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.2, for a summary of attitudes towards work and towards Jobcentre Plus.

One in five respondents (21 per cent) said they would have liked more time with Jobcentre Plus staff or advisers. This was higher among those who were looking for work, as well as black respondents and those on a low income.

6.2.5 In-work support

Previous research has found that lone parents continue to need support after starting work. This can be to help with practical issues in the transition to work, for example paperwork and issues related to finances, the workplace, or childcare (Hosain and Breen, 2007), or to find alternative jobs that were more suitable, less stressful or more family-friendly (Casebourne and Britton, 2004).

Among those who had started work in the previous 12 months, around half (53 per cent) said that their contact with Jobcentre Plus staff had occurred while they were working: 13 per cent only during that time and 41 per cent both when they were working and when they were not. The remaining 47 per cent said they only had contact when they were not working. These findings relate to all lone parents who had started work in the previous 12 months, and so include those who had started a mini-job while continuing to claim IS.

The survey also asked about awareness of the In Work Emergency Discretion Fund. Overall, one in eight respondents (13 per cent) said they were aware of it, and this was most likely to be from a Jobcentre Plus adviser (85 per cent), or alternatively from a friend or relative (ten per cent).

6.3 Experience of sanctions

One in eight lone parents (13 per cent) said that their benefits had been reduced (eight per cent) or stopped (five per cent) by Jobcentre Plus as a result of a missed appointment in the previous 12 months.

The LPO qualitative research found a reasonable awareness of the conditions of the IS regime and implications for sanctions (Gloster et al., 2010), although other evidence has reported low awareness of sanctioning (for example, Goodwin, 2008; Joyce and Whiting, 2006).

In this survey, experience of sanctions was higher for women than men (14 per cent compared with five per cent) and was particularly high among those aged under 25 (26 per cent). It was lower for those in work (four per cent) and owner-occupiers (four per cent). Respondents who reported financial problems were also more likely to say that they had been sanctioned (18 per cent), although it is not possible to establish cause and effect, that is whether sanctioning actually contributed to financial problems. Previous research has also found a greater prevalence of debt among those experiencing sanctions, alongside a general disinclination to check benefit payments, even when the amount received was believed to be incorrect (Goodwin, 2008). In general, previous evidence from several countries, including the US, suggests that sanctions are experienced disproportionately by more disadvantaged lone parents (Finn and Gloster, 2010).

Previous evidence has found the most common causes of a lone parent failing to attend a WFI (on IS) were centred on caring responsibilities, ill health and the customer simply forgetting (Goodwin, 2008).

6.4 JSA flexibilities

Lone parents on the JSA regime are subject to the same legal regulations as other jobseekers, including being required to complete a Jobseeker's Agreement, actively look for work and attend a Jobcentre Plus office regularly to confirm that they have been available for and actively seeking work. While many lone parents will be able to meet existing JSA requirements, it is recognised that the circumstances of lone parents are varied. Therefore, new 'parent flexibilities' have been inserted into the JSA regulations for lone parents and dependent partners of main claimants who are parents, to recognise their responsibility to care for a dependent child.

Respondents who had claimed JSA in the previous 12 months were asked whether they had been told about any flexibilities (even if they had not taken them up). The number of respondents answering the questions was small (65), and also represents an unusual group (people who had claimed JSA some time before their IS eligibility was due to end). As a result, findings should be interpreted with caution.

While the majority of respondents were not aware of the specific flexibilities, a proportion had been told they were allowed to only look for work that was during school hours only (12 per cent) or have the availability and costs of childcare taken into account when working out their availability to work (eight per cent). In addition, some respondents (15 per cent) said that Jobcentre Plus had been more flexible with them around their availability to work during school holidays, when no available or affordable childcare could be found.

Despite the caveats over the small sample answering this question, these findings suggest that Jobcentre Plus staff are making JSA customers aware of specific flexibilities at least in some cases. However, it is worth noting that in the qualitative research, Jobcentre Plus staff reported that they apply the flexibilities where appropriate but do not typically inform lone parent customers about them. In other words, customers' awareness of the flexibilities does not necessarily reflect the extent to which they are actually being applied.

6.5 Overall attitudes to Jobcentre Plus support

Most lone parents in the survey said that the advice they had received from Jobcentre Plus in the previous 12 months had been helpful (83 per cent), rather than not helpful (14 per cent). In the LPO qualitative research, many customers felt happy with the support received from their Lone Parent Advisers and reported that they had good relationships with their advisers. However, customers generally expressed more mixed or negative views on Jobcentre Plus staff as a whole (Gloster et al., 2010).

The ways in which advice had helped lone parents are shown in Table 6.5. At least one in six said that the advice had made them more aware of job opportunities, increased their confidence and improved their skills. The table also shows that many respondents (50 per cent) either said that they had not had any help or advice, found it difficult to say how advice had helped or did not think the questions were applicable to them. This suggests that many lone parents attending WFIs or other appointments at Jobcentre Plus do not necessarily see these meetings as sources of advice, possibly perceiving them as appointments they have to attend. This has implications for when these customers move to JSA, when they will need to go to a Jobcentre Plus office more frequently, and have short meetings which may also not be perceived as providing 'advice'. Indeed, the LPO qualitative research found that when lone parents moved onto JSA, '*signing-on appointments were felt by customers to be of little use to them in their job search, and of more use to the Jobcentre to check they had been looking for work*' (Gloster et al., 2010).

Table 6.5 How Jobcentre Plus advice has helped in previous 12 months

	%
Made more aware of job opportunities	40
Increased confidence	25
Improved skills	16
Not had any help or advice	22
Hard to say/don't know	19
Not applicable	9
<i>Base: All with contact with Jobcentre Plus in previous 12 months</i>	<i>2,567</i>

The majority of lone parents were satisfied with the overall service provided by Jobcentre Plus (69 per cent), with 13 per cent dissatisfied (see Table 6.6). The 2009 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey has found that IS customers are generally more satisfied than other working-age customers, and that lone parents are particularly satisfied (compared with other IS customers). In fact, the figures from the LPO survey are somewhat less positive than in the previous two Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Surveys where in 2009, 82 per cent of IS customers were satisfied, and in 2007 (the last time lone parents were analysed separately), 84 per cent of lone parents on IS were satisfied (Johnson and Fidler, 2008; Thomas et al., 2010). There are several possible interpretations for the lower satisfaction observed in the LPO survey. One relates to research design, as answers may be affected by question ordering and content, as well as survey mode (the LPO survey was conducted face to face, the Jobcentre Plus customer satisfaction survey by telephone). However, it is also possible that satisfaction levels have fallen in the last year, either among lone parents generally, or for those affected by LPO. This may be due to the introduction of QWFIs, or being notified about their IS eligibility ending.

Table 6.6 Overall satisfaction with the service provided by Jobcentre Plus

	%
Very satisfied	26
Fairly satisfied	43
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	18
Fairly dissatisfied	8
Very dissatisfied	5
Don't know	1
<i>Base: All with contact with Jobcentre Plus in previous 12 months</i>	<i>2,567</i>

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with three aspects of the IS benefit regime. As shown in Table 6.7, respondents were more likely to agree than disagree that Jobcentre Plus understands their needs and that they received the right amount of support on IS. Views were divided as to whether on IS people are pushed into things they don't want to do (approximately equal numbers agreed as disagreed).

Table 6.7 Attitudes to IS regime

	Jobcentre Plus staff understand my needs %	On IS, people are pushed into things they don't want to do %	On IS, I am given the right amount of support by Jobcentre Plus staff %
Strongly agree	10	9	5
Agree	44	27	47
Neither agree nor disagree	23	27	24
Disagree	14	31	16
Strongly disagree	5	2	4
Don't know	4	4	4
Strongly agree/agree	54	36	52
Strongly disagree/disagree	19	33	20

Base: All respondents currently on IS (2,605).

In the various questions assessing attitudes to Jobcentre Plus services and the IS regime, some consistent sub-group patterns emerged. A number of groups were more positive than average, including:

- customers with more recent contact with Jobcentre Plus staff, who were more positive on most items;
- those who had been on NDLP at some point, who were more positive on most items;
- respondents who had recently left IS to start a job, specifically in relation to the confidence they had gained from Jobcentre Plus advice, as well as more general attitudes to Jobcentre Plus support;
- Asian respondents, specifically in relation to improving skills and getting appropriate support. This reflects findings from the 2009 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey, which found higher levels of satisfaction among working-age Asian customers as a whole (Thomas et al., 2010).

Groups that were less positive than average included:

- respondents who reported financial problems, who were more negative on most items;
- those qualified to Level 4 or above, in relation to general attitudes and the support they received;
- respondents with a LLSI, especially those who had both mental health and physical problems, who were more negative on most items. This corresponds to the 2009 Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey, which observed lower levels of satisfaction among IS customers with a LSI (Thomas et al., 2010);
- those who said that they don't expect to work in the future, in relation to confidence, skills, and feeling people are pushed into things they don't want to do on IS;
- respondents aged under 25, in relation to overall satisfaction and support;
- those with caring responsibilities, in relation to overall satisfaction and support;
- those who said they had experienced sanctioning whilst on IS, in relation to overall satisfaction and support.

Overall, these findings reflect a pattern observed previously in relation to lone parent WFIIs, in which more job-ready customers were positive towards WFIIs, while those further from the labour market were more resistant (Thomas, 2007). In addition, these findings indicate that customers with specific or different needs, for example those with a LLSI or caring responsibilities, or those who were more highly qualified, did not necessarily feel that the support they received on IS reflected these needs.

6.6 Summary

- Nearly all respondents (92 per cent) had spoken to an adviser or Jobcentre Plus staff in the previous 12 months (subsequent summary findings are based on this group). Where this was the case, the majority had attended either three or four meetings in the previous 12 months (40 per cent), or just one or two (50 per cent). These figures reflect the recent move from six-monthly to QWFIs for this cohort.
- Two in three lone parents said they had received a BOC in the previous 12 months, while 15 per cent had been referred to a careers adviser, and nine per cent referred to an external provider. One in ten (10 per cent) said they had been on NDLP, including five per cent who said they were currently on NDLP. This is lower than the proportions indicated in administrative data.
- Of those that had been looking for work, 17 per cent said they were advised to hold out for a better job, rather than take the first job that came along (11 per cent), and 69 per cent had at least some encouragement to get a job that was right for them.
- Two in five (43 per cent) said that there was a particular person they tried to see at Jobcentre Plus, and of these over half (56 per cent) said that this person had made a lot of effort to get to know them. In total, 63 per cent said that they felt their individual circumstances were taken into account in the advice they had received. However, 21 per cent would have liked more time with Jobcentre Plus staff.
- One in eight (13 per cent) said they had experienced sanctions while on IS because they had missed an appointment, resulting in benefits either being reduced (eight per cent) or stopped (five per cent).
- Overall attitudes to Jobcentre Plus were mostly positive, with 83 per cent saying that the advice overall had been helpful, and 69 per cent satisfied with Jobcentre Plus services. Respondents were also more likely to agree rather than disagree that Jobcentre Plus understands their needs and gives them the right amount of support. However, lone parents were as likely to agree as disagree that people are pushed into things they don't want to do on IS.
- Attitudes to Jobcentre Plus tended to be more positive among those with experience of NDLP and those who had more recent contact with Jobcentre Plus. Views were more negative among lone parents with financial problems and those with a LLSI.

7 Work aspirations and the future

This chapter examines the activities undertaken by lone parents in looking for work and their attitudes towards possible future work. It looks at jobsearch intensity (number of job applications and interviews) and flexibility (work preferences and willingness to broaden these preferences). In addition, work-related training is also examined. The chapter considers these findings in relation to the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime that many of these lone parents will move onto.

7.1 Looking for work

7.1.1 Work preferences

Respondents who were either looking for work, or said they thought they would look for work at a specified time in the future, were asked about the hours they would like to work.

Most respondents stated a preference for working 16–29 hours per week, with many specifying exactly 16 hours. This preference for working for 16 hours per week is likely to reflect the financial incentives in the current benefit system, based on the marginal deduction rate of increasing working hours.³⁵ The threshold of 16 hours per week is also relevant in relation to tax credits; lone parents need to work 16 hours or more a week to claim help with childcare costs through Working Tax Credit. Other evidence supports the overall finding of a preference for part-time work among lone parents when seeking work (see, for example, Bell *et al.*, 2005).

As shown in Table 7.1, preferences for working hours partly reflect the hours that lone parents had worked in the past. For example, those that had worked 30 hours or more per week in the past were considerably more likely than other respondents to prefer these hours for future work. At the same time, many respondents wanted to work different hours than they had previously; in particular, those that had worked less than 16 hours per week in their last job, or were currently doing so, were mostly keen to work longer hours in a future job.

In addition, a preference for longer hours was higher among men (51 per cent wanted to work 30 hours or more per week, compared with 19 per cent of women) and those who were more highly qualified (30 per cent of those qualified to Level 4 or above wanted to work 30 or more hours per week, compared with 16 per cent of those with no qualifications). Preferred hours tended to be lower among those who did not speak English as their first language (11 per cent) and those who had never worked (14 per cent).

³⁵ According to the government document *Universal Credit: welfare that works*, ‘under the current system a lone parent working 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage would only increase their take home pay by £5 a week if they increased their hours to 25 hours’ (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010).

Table 7.1 Preferred hours in future work

Preferred hours per week	Column Percentages			
	Hours in current/previous job ¹			
	30 or more %	16-29 %	Less than 16 %	Total %
Less than 16	1	2	7	5
16	33	44	52	45
17-29	23	34	25	27
30+	40	18	14	21
Don't know	3	2	2	3
<i>Base: All looking for work or thought would look for work at specified time in the future</i>	288	367	300	1,863

¹ Analysis restricted to respondents who had worked since the birth of their oldest child.

Respondents were also asked whether they would take a job with more or fewer hours than they had given as their preference. Table 7.2 shows the highest number of hours that respondents said they would accept. This indicates that, in principle, most respondents would accept a job of 30 hours or more per week and almost all would take a job of 16 hours or more. At the same time, most respondents also said they would take a job with fewer hours: 85 per cent of those whose preference was for at least 16 hours or more per week said that they would accept a job with fewer hours than they preferred. Overall, these findings suggest that, at least in principle, respondents would be reasonably flexible in the hours they would work, although, as seen below, this would depend on hours worked in relation to school hours and terms.

Table 7.2 Preferred and acceptable hours

	Preferred %	Highest would accept %
Less than 16	5	*
16-29	72	39
30+	21	57
Don't know	3	3

Base: All looking for work or thought would look for work at specified time in the future (1,863).

The above findings suggest that, in principle, lone parents in the survey would prefer to work 16 hours or more per week rather than less than 16 hours per week, as only five per cent gave a preference of less than 16 hours. In terms of current jobsearch activity, around one in five were looking for work of less than 16 hours per week. The relevant figures were 19 per cent among respondents who were looking for work (and not currently in work) at the time of the survey, and 18 per cent among respondents currently working less than 16 hours per week who were looking for different work. This suggests that while lone parents may prefer to work more than 16 hours per week in the future, in some cases they were not yet ready or able to do so. This is reflected in the sub-group differences. Those looking for work of less than 16 hours per week were more likely to be in the following sub-groups, all associated with greater barriers to work or distance from the labour market. This included:

- those whose first language was not English;
- respondents with literacy or numeracy problems;
- those with three or more children;
- respondents whose ability to work was restricted by a child's long-standing illness or disability (LSI);
- those who had never worked.

As noted above, previous research has indicated that mini-jobs may be used as a stepping stone to longer working hours. This survey indicates that the above sub-groups may be those for whom this might apply most strongly.

As well as asking about preferred hours, the survey also asked lone parents whether they would be willing to work outside of school hours or in the school holidays. Again, these questions were asked of respondents who were either looking for work or said they intended to look for work at a specified point in the future. As shown in Table 7.3, only 20 per cent said they would be prepared to work before or after-school hours, and 47 per cent said they would work throughout the school year.

Table 7.3 Willingness to work outside of school hours or in school holidays

Would you be prepared to work?	%
Before/after school hours	20
Only during school hours	59
It depends	21
Throughout the year	47
Term time only	36
It depends	17
<i>Base: All looking for work or intending to look for work at specified time in the future</i>	<i>1,918</i>

Respondents were more likely to say they would work outside of school hours and/or in the school holidays if they were currently looking for work (rather than intending to do so in the future). Lone parents were also more likely to say this if they:

- had only started claiming IS in the last year;
- currently used some form of childcare.

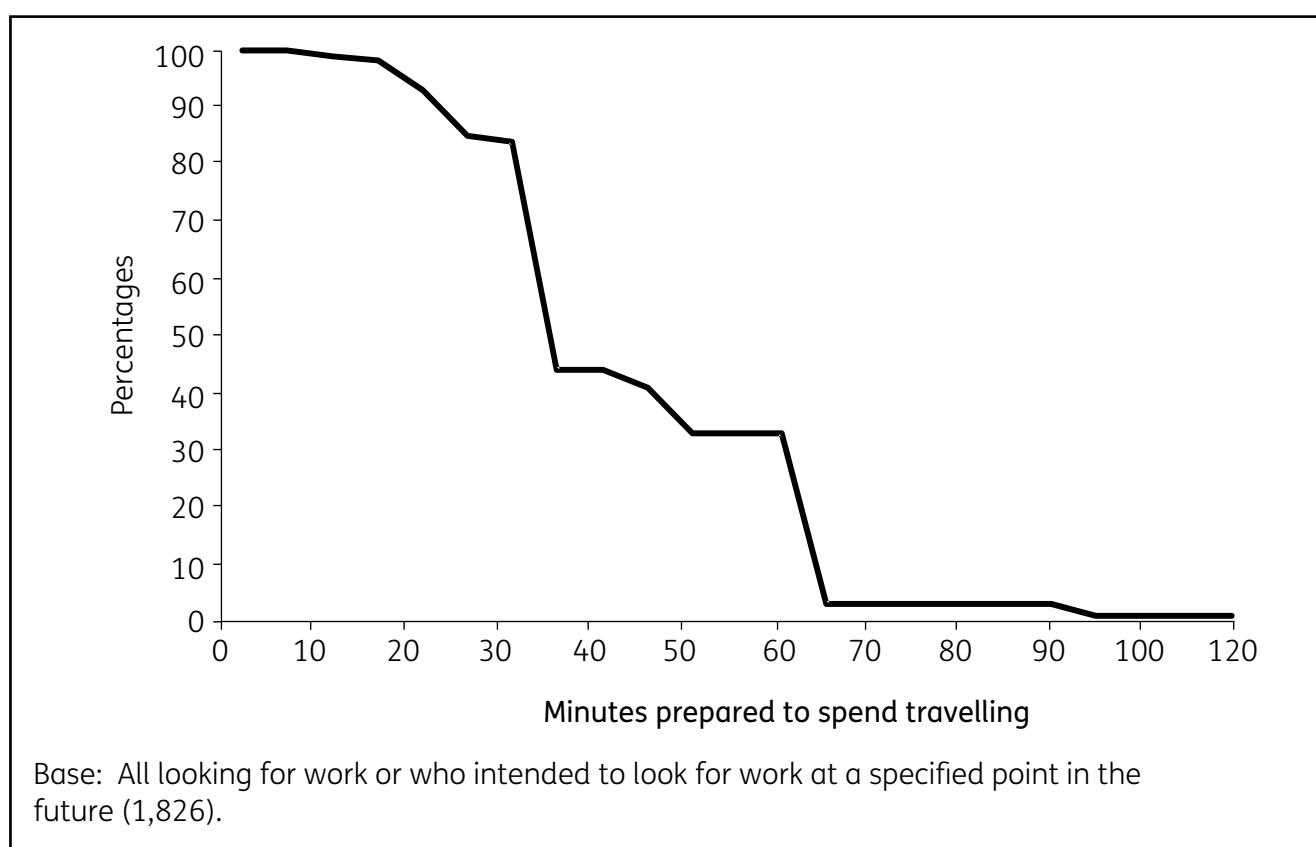
Those with four or more children, or who did not speak English as their first language, were less likely to be willing to work in the school holidays. These findings indicate that many respondents would be restricted in the types of work they would do, and that although the majority said they would accept a job of 30 hours or more per week (as shown in Table 7.2), in reality most would be looking to work fewer hours than this. Overall, this section indicates that most lone parents in the survey would prefer to work for 16-29 hours per week during school hours, and in some cases during school term-time only. This confirms previous evidence, which found that among lone mothers, '*the consensus was that part-time, school hours were the best option until children were older, at least beyond the age of eight or nine years, and ideally at secondary school*' (Ridge and Millar, 2008). The recent research on In Work Credit also noted the importance to lone parents of working hours that fitted around their childcare commitments and children's school hours, and that this was more important

than the type of job they did. The research found that ‘where lone parents specified the type of work they had been looking for, it often reflected the type of work that is available part time, which was, in the main, low-paid, low-skilled work’ (Sims et al., 2010).

Work flexibility

Most lone parents (84 per cent) who were either looking for work or intended to work at a specified point in the future said they would be prepared to spend at least 30 minutes travelling to work (one way). One in three (33 per cent) said they would be prepared to spend an hour. Details are shown in Figure 7.1. The average (mean) was 40 minutes, and the most common answer (median) was 30 minutes.

Figure 7.1 Time prepared to spend travelling to work (one way)



The time that respondents said they were prepared to spend was higher if they:

- did not have access to a car (so were reliant on public transport);
- had ever been on New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP);
- said they would like to work 30 hours or more per week.

Respondents who were either looking for work or intended to work at a specified point in the future were also asked if they would be prepared to move to a different area for the sake of a job. One in four (25 per cent) said that they would be prepared to move. This was higher where respondents were actually looking for work (28 per cent), and was also higher among black respondents and those in London (38 per cent and 37 per cent respectively). Younger respondents (aged under 30) and those who were more highly qualified were also more likely to say they would move for a job.

7.1.2 Jobsearch activities

Lone parents who had looked for a job in the previous 12 months were asked some questions about job applications and interviews. Less than half of these respondents (44 per cent) had applied for a job in the previous 12 months³⁶, while a further seven per cent had seen vacancies that they intended to apply for.

Respondents were more likely to have applied for a job if they had more recent work experience (50 per cent of those who had worked since their oldest child was born, 36 per cent if they had last worked before this, and 29 per cent if they had never worked). More highly qualified respondents were also more likely to have applied for a job (ranging from 51 per cent of those qualified to Level 4 or above to 34 per cent of those with no formal qualifications).

Around half (46 per cent) of those that had applied for a job said that they had found at least one vacancy through Jobcentre Plus. This was higher (65 per cent) among those that had been on NDLP at some time in the past, although these respondents were no more likely to have made job applications overall, compared with others looking for work. Table 7.4 shows the number of job applications made.

Table 7.4 Number of job applications made in previous 12 months

	%
1 or 2	35
3-5	27
6-10	18
11-19	8
20 or more	12
<i>Base: All looking for work in previous 12 months</i>	<i>1,067</i>

Around half (48 per cent) of those that had made job applications had been for a job interview. This was most likely to have been just one job interview (55 per cent), while 11 per cent had been to five or more. As with job applications, respondents who were more highly qualified were more likely to have been for a job interview (63 per cent qualified to Level 4 or above, falling to 38 per cent of those without formal qualifications).

The figures obtained in the survey for job applications (44 per cent of those looking for work in the previous 12 months) and job interviews (48 per cent of those that had applied for jobs) appear relatively low in comparison with other evidence on Jobcentre Plus customers. While we would expect JSA customers to show greater jobsearch intensity, corresponding figures also look to be as high if not higher among other customer groups who were looking for work. For example, in the survey of customers attending Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) for Partners, similar proportions had applied for jobs and attended job interviews as in this survey, but over a shorter time period (six months rather than a year) (Coleman and Seeds, 2007). In the survey of Joint Claims for JSA, most partners of JSA customers had applied for a job in the previous six months (85 per cent of female respondents) (Bewley *et al.*, 2005). In addition, the corresponding proportions in the lone parent WFI evaluation were also slightly higher (Coleman *et al.*, 2003). Overall, this evidence suggests the jobsearch intensity of lone parents in this survey is relatively low. This raises questions about the likely impact of a move to JSA among these lone parents, which is discussed in the Conclusions chapter (Chapter 8).

³⁶ This figure will reflect the availability of suitable jobs, as well as intensity of job search.

Respondents who were looking for work were asked about the activities they had done in the previous 12 months to help them find a job. As well as looking for a job on their own, at least one in five had been to a career's office or career's advice department, attended an education or training course or done voluntary work (see Table 7.5 for details).

Table 7.5 Activities done to look for work

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>
	%
Looked for a job on your own	81
Been to a career's office or career's advice department	30
Attended an education or training course	30
Done voluntary work	20
Put your name on the books of a private recruitment agency	13
Done something towards setting up your own business	5
Done an unpaid job arranged through a government programme	2
Something else	2
None of these	5
<i>Base: All looking for work in previous 12 months</i>	<i>1,067</i>

The Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) qualitative research looked more closely at jobsearch methods and found an emphasis on the use of informal contacts to look for a job (Gloster *et al.*, 2010). Previous studies have noted that this approach to job search can, for those in deprived communities and particularly for women and minority ethnic groups, result in movements into poorer quality work (see, for example, Rankin, 2003). The qualitative research also supports this and indicated that lone parents who had been claiming benefits for longer tended to rely more on 'low-tech' methods of jobsearch such as seeking work through the job sections of newspapers and calling into shops to ask if they had any work. Using the internet was less common, either because they did not have access to a computer at home, or because they did not have the skills to use it (Gloster *et al.*, 2010).

Given the relatively low jobsearch intensity noted for this group, greater support in using the internet to find jobs may be considered a priority for support of these lone parents (in WFIIs and under JSA). However, this support will need to recognise scepticism among some lone parents in using the internet for job search (as reported in the LPO qualitative research: Gloster *et al.*, 2010).

7.2 Training or education courses

The previous section noted that 30 per cent of those who were looking for work at the time of the survey had attended an education or training course to help find a job. Across the sample as a whole 29 per cent of lone parents had taken training or education classes in the previous 12 months, to improve skills, help them to do a job or find employment. The following respondents were more likely to have undertaken training or education classes:

- those qualified to Level 3 or above;
- those whose first language was not English;
- those who had been on NDLP.

As noted in Section 4.1.2, lone parents who had taken training or education classes were more likely than other respondents to use formal childcare. This is because lone parents on NDLP may be entitled to financial support to pay for childcare if they are undertaking a course which the adviser considers may help them move into work. Around one in five (22 per cent) of those who had been on training in the previous 12 months used formal childcare (compared with 12 per cent of lone parents not involved in training). Uptake of training was lower among those who had a youngest child under six, and among male lone parents.

One in five respondents (21 per cent) who had been on a training or education course said that Jobcentre Plus staff had arranged the course (or at least one of the courses they had done). This figure was 35 per cent among those that had been on NDLP at some point in the past.

Where respondents were no longer doing a course, they were asked whether they had completed it. The majority of individual courses (85 per cent) had been completed. The completion rate was lower among respondents who reported financial difficulties (74 per cent), although financial problems did not feature prominently as the main reason for non-completion: just three per cent of respondents said this was the main reason why they did not complete their course, the most common reasons being dissatisfaction with the course (16 per cent), problems with childcare (15 per cent), becoming ill (ten per cent) or other domestic or personal reasons (19 per cent).

Previous research has found that non-completers of training or education courses (in the adult public as a whole) can be divided into two groups. The first group tend to leave for reasons related to the '*course itself – either because they felt the course was not as expected or was not right for them, or because they had problems with the tutor or teaching*'. The second group cite '*external factors – family, work, health or other personal issues (including changing circumstances)*' (Simm et al., 2007).

7.3 Summary

- Among respondents who were looking for work or expected to do so at a specified time in the future, the majority stated a preference for working 16-29 hours per week, and 45 per cent specified exactly 16 hours. A minority said that they would be prepared to work outside of school hours (20 per cent) and only half (47 per cent) said they would work during school holidays.
- At the same time, most respondents (looking for work or expecting to do so) said they would in principle be willing to work more or fewer hours than they preferred. One in four (25 per cent) said they would move to a different area for work, while the majority said they would spend at least 30 minutes travelling to work, including 33 per cent who said they would be prepared to spend an hour.
- Among lone parents who had looked for a job in the previous 12 months, less than half (44 per cent) had applied for a job during that time. Of these, 48 per cent had been for a job interview. Around half (46 per cent) of those that had applied for a job said that they had found at least one vacancy through Jobcentre Plus.
- Three in ten respondents (30 per cent) had taken training or education classes in the previous 12 months, to improve skills, help them to do a job or find employment. Of these, 21 per cent said that Jobcentre Plus staff had arranged at least one of the courses they had done. The majority of individual courses (85 per cent) had been completed.

8 Conclusions and policy implications

The overall aim of the Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) evaluation is to explore how lone parent employment interventions provide an effective incentive to look for paid employment, alongside an effective package of support for workless lone parents to enable them to find, enter and sustain paid employment. This report has focused on:

- the characteristics and circumstances of lone parents affected by LPO (Chapter 2), and their working background (Chapter 3);
- attitudes, values and beliefs in relation to work and family life, and choices and constraints in relation to work (Chapter 5);
- behaviour in relation to work, either being in work (Chapter 3) or looking for work (Chapter 7), and childcare arrangements (Chapter 4);
- lone parents' experience of and attitudes towards the Income Support (IS) benefit regime (Chapter 6).

The survey has examined a cohort of lone parents some time before their IS eligibility was due to end, so it cannot examine directly the effects that LPO has had or will have in the future. However, the understanding that the survey gives us of these lone parents allows us to consider the likely implications of LPO. Specifically, we can consider the prospects for work of these lone parents, the implications for the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime and implications for the future roll-out of LPO to those with a youngest child aged five.

8.1 Characteristics and circumstances

Although the lone parents in the survey were similar in (mostly) having a youngest child of the same age, there was considerable diversity in their characteristics. Understanding this diversity is important as it indicates the range of needs and circumstances that require support from Jobcentre Plus. This diversity also has important implications for the LPO policy itself. In grouping lone parents according to the age of their youngest child, there is an implicit assumption that those in the same cohort will share similar characteristics and can to some extent receive a similar type of support. Findings from the survey indicate that this is not necessarily the case and underline the importance of recognising and responding to customers' individual needs.

One example of diversity is household structure. It is important to understand the dynamics of particular households and that the presence of other adults can mean different things. Sometimes they are in work and, therefore, contribute to the household's income. They also often help with childcare. However, in other cases the lone parent is caring for other adults in the household and this can be an additional burden and barrier to moving into work.

Five per cent of the lone parents in the survey were male, and male respondents showed some distinctive characteristics. In particular, they were much more likely than female respondents to have a driving licence. They were also more likely to want to work for 30 hours or more per week in the future. However, their current use of and awareness of formal childcare, specifically after-school clubs, was lower than for female lone parents.

The survey also examined indicators of disadvantage, focusing on those indicators that have been observed to be linked to worklessness and distance from the labour market. The comparison with population data shows that, compared with lone parents in the wider population, the lone parents in this survey were most distinctive in relation to worse self-reported health, lower income and greater financial-related problems, lower qualifications, lower vehicle access and higher levels of social renting. In other words, these are the characteristics that appear to distinguish the group of lone parents affected by LPO from other lone parents.

In particular, three issues emerged from the survey as being important for this group of lone parents, both in their own right and in so far as they affected issues such as work and the relationship with Jobcentre Plus. These were health and disability, skills and finance. Each of these is now considered in turn.

The survey found that 28 per cent of all respondents reported a long-standing illness or disability (LSI), and that for 22 per cent overall this limited their activities (LLSI). According to administrative data, incidence of LSI is lower for this group than for other LPO roll-out groups (covering lone parents with older children). Therefore, health problems and disabilities are likely to be less prevalent than seen previously for lone parents ending IS and moving onto other benefits. However, the findings still indicate that a substantial number will continue to move onto Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) rather than JSA, or may continue to face barriers relating to health or disability whilst on JSA.

A specific issue in relation to health and disability is mental health. One in eight lone parents in the survey reported that they had mental health problems (12 per cent) and they were more likely than those with physical disabilities to see them as ‘limiting’. Lone parents with mental health problems also showed distinctive characteristics throughout the report (for example, in relation to work, finances and attitudes to Jobcentre Plus) and these were particularly pronounced where respondents had both a mental health and physical LSI. The importance of addressing mental health problems is reflected in recent policy. For example, the recent review by Frank Field MP considered the key predictors of children’s life chances that may be included in a new measure of child poverty. These included maternal mental health and a mother’s educational qualifications (Field, 2010).

Picking up the second of these items, there was considerable variation in respondents’ skills and qualifications, but most striking was the large proportion (31 per cent) without any formal qualifications. Those without formal qualifications had typically not worked for some time (if at all), and also faced other barriers to work.

Previous research has consistently shown lone parents to be more likely to experience financial hardship and to live in poverty, compared with mothers with partners, and lone parents have been a key focus of the overall aim to reduce child poverty. This survey showed that many lone parents experienced financial problems, both with day-to-day financial management and with debt. Very few lone parents had income from savings, and receipt of child maintenance could be patchy. The qualitative work conducted as part of the LPO evaluation also highlighted that financial support from friends or family was often limited. As a result, many lone parents have little or nothing to fall back on if they face financial difficulties.

The survey identified evidence of multiple disadvantage, compounding barriers to work. For example, those with four or more children will inevitably face more complex childcare arrangements if they move into work. In addition, these respondents were also more likely than other lone parents to face other disadvantages. For example, they were less likely to have any qualifications, and more likely not to speak English as their first language, to live in socially rented housing and to have a child with a LSI or Special Educational Need. Similarly, lone parents with a LSI often had multiple and complex needs, for example they were more likely to also have a child with a LSI and to have caring

responsibilities. Overall, the survey indicated that characteristics related to disadvantage were wide-ranging, but were also focused on certain lone parents who faced more pronounced and complex needs.

8.2 Attitudes, values and beliefs; choices and constraints

Overall, the survey confirms the balance of work and family as a key concern for lone parents due to be affected by LPO. Specifically, the most frequently cited barrier to employment was the need for a job where they could take time off at short notice to look after their child(ren). That said, this group of lone parents reported wanting to work and were more likely to agree with work-focused attitude statements compared with the wider population of lone parents.

A comparison with the wider population shows that these lone parents may not be different to other parents in their ‘family focus’ but the restrictions this brings to employment options are compounded by other barriers, such as lack of skills or recent work experience. This is even more apparent for sub-groups of lone parents, such as those who had never worked or had a limiting disability such as mental health problems.

8.3 Behaviour in relation to work

8.3.1 Work

Ten per cent of respondents were in work at the time of the survey: three per cent who had recently moved off IS into work, and seven per cent who were continuing to claim IS while working less than 16 hours per week. More highly qualified lone parents were more likely to be working while claiming IS, while those with a LLSI were less likely to be in work, particularly those with a mental health problem.

Where respondents were working less than 16 hours per week (also known as ‘mini-jobs’), they were often working a very small number of hours. For example, 42 per cent worked no more than five hours per week. Previous evidence suggests this is typical for lone parents claiming IS, and the concentration on a very small number of hours is greater than in the wider lone parent population. The very low number of hours worked by some lone parents is likely to be influenced to some extent by the current earnings disregard of £20 for lone parents on IS.

More than half of those working less than 16 hours per week had been in the job for more than a year. In addition, 22 per cent did not expect to increase their hours within the next year. This suggests that the often very low number of hours worked by lone parents while on IS is not necessarily seen as a temporary situation or ‘stepping stone’ to increased hours, but more as a stable position which allows lone parents to stay in work without sacrificing their commitment to their family.

Reflecting previous evidence, the work done by lone parents (both at the time of the survey and in the past) was concentrated in low skilled occupations. This particularly applied to those working while claiming IS, 58 per cent of whom worked in elementary occupations. The corresponding figure was 35 per cent among those who had moved off IS into work, and 30 per cent in relation to previous jobs. All of these figures are considerably higher than in the wider lone parent population (14 per cent) or female working population (11 per cent). This indicates that, in this survey, lone parents were unlikely to have any experience of skilled work. In addition, many respondents had not worked for many years, if at all: 24 per cent had not worked at all, and 28 per cent had not worked since the birth of their oldest child at least six years previously. As a result, these lone parents are likely to be at a disadvantage in trying to move into work, particularly if unemployment rises in 2011.

8.3.2 Looking for work

In addition to the ten per cent who were in work at the time of the survey, 38 per cent were looking for work, while 41 per cent expected to look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) in the future, and nine per cent did not expect to look for work of 16 hours or more per week. Overall, the analysis indicates that a number of groups were less likely to be in work or looking for work: those with a LLSI, those with no formal qualifications, and those with a youngest child under six. These groups, along with those that had never worked, can be considered those who were furthest from the labour market at the time of the survey. By contrast, recent work experience appears to be the main factor positively associated with looking for work.

We can consider the lone parents in the survey in terms of distance from the labour market, and the priorities for Jobcentre Plus in supporting them. Firstly, among those **looking for work**, a striking feature was the relatively low jobsearch intensity. The proportions who had made a job application (44 per cent of those looking for work in the previous 12 months) and had a job interview (48 per cent of those that had applied for jobs) appear relatively low in comparison with other evidence on Jobcentre Plus customers. As a result, this means that even when looking for work, lone parents may be gaining very limited knowledge of the labour market and what is available. The JSA regime should help to increase this level of jobsearch intensity.

Lone parents who were **not looking for work but expected to do so in the future** often did not see themselves looking for work for some time. In terms of barriers to work, this group showed a stronger child and family focus than those looking for work. Support, therefore, needs to acknowledge this, while looking for ways to demonstrate the possible benefits of work.

One option is movement into mini-jobs which, as noted above, appear to allow lone parents to work without sacrificing family commitments or making significant changes to childcare arrangements. While previous research evidence is not conclusive as to the role of mini-jobs as a stepping stone to increased working hours, the survey findings suggest that they can at least give some work experience to those who have been out of the labour market for a long time. The survey identified a number of groups who may be suitable for mini-jobs, given their complex barriers and lack of work experience. These include those whose first language is not English, those with literacy or numeracy problems, those with three or more children, those whose ability to work is restricted by a child's LSI and those who had never worked. The introduction of Universal Credit, which aims to improve work incentives irrespective of hours worked, should potentially encourage more lone parents to take up mini-jobs.

Of those that **do not expect to look for work in the future**, it is likely that a substantial proportion will be exempt from the LPO changes, for example because of caring responsibilities. Given that the survey suggests the overall numbers of exemptions might be quite high in the later roll-out groups, including those who have younger children, it will be important to have a strategy for those who remain on IS due to exemption, starting with an identification of the reason for exemption and leading to an assessment of how the IS regime can best help these individuals.

Those with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity (LLSI) were particularly likely not to expect to work (16 hours or more per week) in the future. The qualitative research found that those with a LSI can have '*disparate journeys*' as part of LPO, and that these customers could experience difficulties in negotiating this type of process. The quantitative findings therefore indicate that customers who have to focus their attention on negotiating the complexities of transferring across benefits are also those who can be furthest from the labour market. This scenario also makes it more difficult for Jobcentre Plus to provide a coherent and personalised service, when this is needed particularly strongly.

8.3.3 Childcare

In considering barriers to work, many lone parents said that they wanted to look after their children themselves, or restrict childcare to close friends and family. These attitudes increased among respondents who were further from the labour market. This is reflected in the actual use of childcare, with those more distant from the labour market less likely to use childcare at all, and with use of childcare increasing when respondents were in work, particularly 16 or more hours per week.

Those working less than 16 hours per week made limited use of childcare, particularly formal childcare, but use of formal childcare increased among those working 16 hours or more per week. This has implications for lone parents looking to increase their hours, as the findings suggest that the movement from mini-jobs to work of 16 hours or more per week will often require a change in childcare use, and therefore may not be a straightforward transition. Therefore, advice for those working less than 16 hours per week needs to include a strong emphasis on childcare options, in order to support a move to a greater number of hours. This will need to take a broad approach to childcare options and the overall balance between work and family, given the greater tensions felt by respondents working 16 hours or more per week in balancing work and family, dealing with employer pressures, and making sustainable childcare arrangements that will allow them to stay in work.

Breakfast or after-school clubs on school sites were by far the most commonly used type of formal childcare. This reflects the age profile of children covered by the survey – predominantly primary school-age children, with very few pre-school children. Respondents also expressed a strong interest in using after-school or holiday clubs in the future, suggesting that there may be scope for encouraging more lone parents to use this type of childcare, particularly if awareness can be increased. This applies to holiday clubs, as only 21 per cent of non-users were aware of holiday clubs.

Another way of encouraging greater use of formal childcare is through participation in training. Free formal childcare is sometimes available to lone parents undertaking training classes on New Deal for Lone Parents. In this survey 22 per cent of those who had been on training in the previous 12 months had used formal childcare. This is a useful way of allowing lone parents to try it out for fewer hours than may be required in a job, thus increasing their familiarity with formal childcare.

Overall, the findings confirmed a reliance on informal childcare, with grandparents and the ex-partner providing the bulk of informal childcare. The ex-partner was also the one type of childcare which showed significantly higher use among those in work, compared with those not in work. The hours of childcare provided by the ex-partner far exceeded those for other types of childcare. This may explain why lone parents make greater use of the ex-partner where a move into work requires an increased need for childcare, and confirms that the ex-partner can be crucial in enabling some lone parents to move into work.

The role of the ex-partner could potentially be explored by the Child Maintenance Options service³⁷, as part of the information and support it provides on the different child maintenance options available to parents. This advice could consider not just the most appropriate maintenance arrangements, but how shared care or some childcare by the non-resident parent can enhance lone parents' work options. In addition, the Child Maintenance Options service could also play a useful role in advising lone parents on financial and debt management. The survey found this to be a common problem for lone parents (as noted previously), and part of the Child Maintenance Options services' wider role is to promote the financial responsibility that parents have for their children.

Previous research has examined the use of informal childcare among lone parents and a perceived reluctance to use formal childcare. To some extent, this survey confirms these findings: where childcare is used, there is an emphasis on informal childcare. When considering barriers to work, many lone parents, particularly those further from the labour market, said that they either wanted to look after their children themselves or restrict childcare to close friends and family.

However, although the lone parents in this survey made greater use of informal childcare than other lone parents (if in work) or mothers with partners (if not in work), their use of formal childcare was similar. This may partly reflect the age of children covered in this survey (generally school age). Findings from other surveys (*Families and Children Study 2008* and the *Childcare and early years surveys of parents 2009*) show that use of formal childcare is generally very similar between lone parents and mothers with partners, across different child age groups. In other words, the preference for informal childcare and the desire to combine work with parenting is not unique to lone parents on IS. However, when combined with other barriers, these preferences may exacerbate the problems lone parents have in moving into work.

8.4 Experience of, and attitudes towards, the IS benefit regime

In line with previous research evidence, the qualitative research noted that lone parent customers still on IS 'valued the flexible and individualised support on offer', which was helped by seeing the same adviser over time (Gloster et al., 2010). In the survey, only around two in five lone parents (43 per cent) said that there was a particular person at Jobcentre Plus that they tried to speak to. In addition, while most respondents thought that their circumstances had been taken into account in the advice they had received, one in four (27 per cent) did not. Overall, these findings suggest that the lone parents in the survey were not always getting a high level of individualised support.

General attitudes to Jobcentre Plus were mostly positive, with 83 per cent saying that the advice overall had been helpful, and 69 per cent satisfied with Jobcentre Plus services. Overall, the findings reflect a pattern observed previously in relation to lone parent Work Focused Interviews (WFI), in which more job-ready customers were positive towards WFIs, while those further from the labour market were more resistant (Thomas, 2007). In addition, these findings indicate that customers with

³⁷ The Child Maintenance Options service is an information and advice service provided by the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, the Non-Departmental Public Body responsible for the child maintenance system in Great Britain. The Commission assumed control of the Child Support Agency from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in November 2008, with a primary objective to 'maximise the number of effective child maintenance arrangements in place for children who live apart from one or both of their parents'. In addition to providing an efficient statutory maintenance service, the Commission is also tasked with promoting the financial responsibility that parents have for their children and providing information and support on the different child maintenance options available, through the Child Maintenance Options service.

specific or different needs, such as those with a LLSI or caring responsibilities, or those who were more highly qualified, did not necessarily feel that the support they received on IS reflected these needs.

8.5 Implications for the future

This section considers the implications of the survey findings for the future in relation to lone parents' future movement into work, the implications for support for these lone parents under JSA, the future roll-out of LPO and the introduction of Universal Credit.

8.5.1 Movement into work

The long-term absence from work among many respondents can be considered in the context of the labour market as a whole. The proportion of women in employment has grown markedly over the last four decades. More specifically, figures on the proportion of lone parents without a disability who lack work showed a consistent fall, to 32 per cent in 2009, down from 43 per cent a decade earlier (Parekh *et al.*, 2010). This trend can be linked to some extent to the increase in part-time workers, which recently stood at 7.98 million, the highest level since Office for National Statistics (ONS) records began in 1992 (ONS, 2010b). Other structural changes, such as a policy focus on subsidised childcare, tax credits and the increase in the national minimum wage, have also helped to encourage lone parents to move from benefit into work.

However, the lone parents in this survey had often been out of work for some time, and in most cases had passed the point at which their youngest child had started school, an important threshold for many lone parents looking to return to work.

Furthermore, the most recent employment trends have started to show a changing pattern, with a reverse in the general trend of increased employment among women. Over the past year the number of women out of work increased by 77,000 to one million. The female unemployment rate now stands at seven per cent – equal to the worst level since 1995, which marks a high point since the start of the jobs recession in 2008 (ONS, 2010b).

Part-time work has grown in recent years, but analysis has identified the rise of under-employment, which includes part-time workers unable to find a full-time job (standing at 1.1 million in 2010, ONS, 2010b). The future level of part-time work is also uncertain, and large numbers of job cuts are expected in the public sector. Overall, this suggests that increased numbers of lone parent and other jobseekers will be competing for a limited and potentially decreasing number of part-time jobs. The survey findings indicate that a proportion of lone parents affected by LPO will be in a good position to compete for these jobs, notably those with higher qualifications and with current and recent work experience. However, these are a minority; more typical are the lone parents with little recent work experience, low skills and other barriers to work.

In addition, the survey showed the preference among these lone parents to work during school hours, and in some cases, during school term-time only. The survey findings suggested that the balance between work and family was most likely to be seen as workable when respondents were working less than 16 hours per week. When they were working 16 hours or more (and in many cases this was exactly 16 hours) lone parents were more likely to see their working pattern as inconvenient for family life, with 42 per cent saying that their job prevented them from giving the time they wanted to their children at least 'sometimes'.

This stress has can be increased when employers are not sympathetic to lone parents' circumstances. Some of the respondents in work said that their employer was not family-friendly

and that this was a large barrier to them staying in work (eight per cent), while nine per cent said that the pressure to work longer hours or do overtime was a large barrier. In general, the survey indicated that employers are somewhat patchy in offering flexible and family-friendly arrangements. This suggests that the DWP and Jobcentre Plus need to continue to work with local employers to promote family-friendly workplaces.

8.5.2 JSA and the Work Programme

Once eligibility for IS has ended, the most common destination for lone parents affected by LPO is a move onto JSA. By summer 2011 the existing welfare to work provision, including Flexible New Deal and Pathways to Work, will be replaced by a single integrated Work Programme which will support workless lone parents, alongside other workless people, into employment.

This section considers the implications of the survey for the JSA regime and the Work Programme, in particular how different lone parents might respond to the change in benefit regime and how Jobcentre Plus might accommodate their diverse needs.

In the qualitative research, lone parent customers who had moved to JSA from IS compared the two regimes. In general they felt that on JSA '*there was less support offered, fewer training opportunities and a sense that they were offered a less personalised service*' (Casebourne et al., 2010). At the same time, this survey has highlighted the diverse and complex needs and barriers of this group of lone parents, confirming the need for personalised support. This suggests that the JSA regime needs to do whatever is possible to personalise and tailor the service to lone parents. As suggested in the qualitative research, this could include an increased use of specialist Jobcentre Plus staff and enabling longer interviews than the existing appointment system allows, particularly in order to discuss childcare.

The qualitative work also found that, although JSA could be '*a demanding and sometimes uncomfortable experience*' for lone parents, in comparison with claiming IS, this was helping to give them '*a push towards work*' (Casebourne et al., 2010). The JSA regime should also increase jobsearch intensity, one of the issues noted in this survey for this group of lone parents which may be slowing their movement into work.

However, the survey indicates that it will not be straightforward to help these customers to move into and stay in work. Firstly, most lone parents have a preference for part-time work that fits in with school hours (and sometimes school holidays), but are not always confident that the type of work they want is available. They also expressed concerns over whether employers are family-friendly. There are a number of ways in which Jobcentre Plus can address these concerns. Firstly, they can help to identify jobs that match these preferences, where they are available. As these lone parents currently have very limited exposure to the labour market (with little recent work experience and low levels of jobsearch activity), their perceptions about available work may not reflect the reality, and Jobcentre Plus staff may be able to increase their knowledge.

Secondly, Jobcentre Plus staff may be able to broaden customers' perspectives on the range of jobs that may be appropriate. At present, lone parents have a range of concerns about work, including those noted above, as well as whether they will be better off in work. Jobcentre Plus staff may be able to reassure them about some of these issues (for example that there are family-friendly employers in the local area) and then work on some of the more negotiable areas of concern, so that lone parents may be willing to work more hours if they can be convinced that they would be better off financially.

In addition, Jobcentre Plus staff may be able to challenge some of the attitudes that customers have towards work, in relation to the balance between work and family. This will clearly be a

challenge, and the qualitative work found ‘no evidence that the JSA regime was changing lone parent attitudes to the type of work they were willing to do or to childcare’ (Casebourne et al., 2010). As noted above, the survey findings also suggest that the balance between work and family can come under pressure when lone parents work 16 hours or more per week.

The survey has highlighted the low qualifications among many lone parents who themselves saw one of their largest barriers to work as lacking the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job they would want (40 per cent saw this as a big barrier). Job prospects may be improved by encouraging lone parents to participate in training, and to get some work experience, including voluntary work. This raises the question as to the balance between skills and experience. In the longer term, job prospects may be improved by encouraging lone parents to participate in training. At the same time, it is important to recognise that many of the lone parents have not worked for a considerable amount of time, and that some work experience (including voluntary work) may be beneficial. The recent research examining FACS data for lone parents noted that prolonged absence from work tended to ‘re-inforce “anti-work” attitudes’ (Tomaszewski et al., 2010), and had both a direct and indirect impact on a slow return to work. Overall, these findings suggest that any support provided to lone parents while on IS to become more work-ready will be helpful in preparing for a move to JSA.

Finally, the JSA regime and Work Programme will need to address low motivation and commitment among those further from the labour market. The survey indicated that 40 per cent of respondents were not expecting to look for work (of 16 hours or more per week) in the next year. That is, beyond the time their eligibility for IS was due to end and they would need to start claiming JSA. This includes a group that is committed to looking after their children and, for now, do not see work as an option for them. This same group also faces other barriers, such as low skills and lack of previous work experience, that further distance them from a likely move into work. This group is likely to represent the greatest challenge to the JSA regime in the future.

Already, some lone parents are resistant to the work focus of the IS regime, agreeing with the statement that they are ‘pushed into things they don’t want to do’. This confirms findings from the lone parent WFI evaluation, which found some resistance to attending WFIs, with some lone parents seeing them as irrelevant or inappropriate (Thomas, 2007). We also know from the qualitative research that, when they move to JSA, ‘lone parents who had been out of the labour market for a longer period tended to have a more negative view of the [JSA] regime as a whole, comparing their experiences unfavourably with when they were on IS’ (Casebourne et al., 2010). It will be important to try to engage these lone parents and emphasise the support provided by the JSA regime, rather than just the conditionality.

8.5.3 Future roll-out of Lone Parent Obligations

The United Kingdom’s new coalition Government, which came to power in May 2010, has outlined its plans to extend the scope of conditionality for lone parents on benefits, and from early 2012 lone parents will lose their eligibility to IS when their youngest child reaches five. The cohort covered by this survey is likely to share many characteristics with lone parents with a youngest child aged five, as their children’s ages are similar (mainly primary-school age). The survey findings have, therefore, two main implications for the further roll-out of LPO to lone parents with a youngest child aged five:

- Firstly, all respondents were included in the sample on the basis that they had a youngest child aged six or seven. However, at the time of the survey 12 per cent of respondents said their youngest child was aged under six (six per cent aged under one, two per cent aged one, and four per cent aged between two and five). The presence of these lone parents in the cohort has implications for LPO, as they will not be affected by the LPO changes until their youngest child reaches five.

- Secondly, this also indicates that lone parents' benefit 'status' is liable to change. Some lone parents will have additional children, and some will re-partner; both will affect their position in relation to benefits, and will also affect the focus of the support they require. In addition, previous evidence has found lone parents to be particularly prone to cycling on and off benefits. Therefore, support will need to be responsive to changing circumstances and benefit status.

8.5.4 Universal Credit

In an effort to simplify the benefit system and improve work incentives, Universal Credit is set to replace the present benefit structure. Provision for this is being made in the 2011 Welfare Reform Bill which will enable changes to take effect from 2013. Universal Credit will simplify the benefits system by bringing together a range of working-age benefits into a single streamlined payment.

A key aim of Universal Credit will be to '*ensure that work always pays and is seen to pay*' (DWP, 2010). This would directly address one of the main perceived barriers to work among lone parents in this survey, namely the perception that 'I am not sure I would be financially better off in work'. Two in five (40 per cent) of those not in work described this as a big barrier to employment, and this was also one of the larger barriers to staying in work among working lone parents. If Universal Credit is able to ensure that lone parents are always better off in work (whatever hours they work), and this message is clear to them, this will undoubtedly help in removing this barrier.

The survey does provide a warning, however, that the comparison between the cost of being in work and being on benefits is not always clear. One of the main barriers among those in work to staying in work was seen as the fact that respondents '*hadn't anticipated all the extra things I would need to spend money on now that I'm in work*'.

Another barrier to staying in work among working respondents was '*finding it hard to adjust to having money coming in every month rather than every week*'. One of the changes included in the proposals for Universal Credit is to move to a consistent monthly payment system, and the aim is that '*there will be appropriate budgeting support to ensure recipients are supported effectively*'. The survey findings on financial difficulties and debt suggest that this support will be very important, both in making the adjustment and in managing finances on a monthly basis.

Even if lone parents are always better off in work, a key question is how much difference will this make, both in helping people to move into work, and encouraging them to work longer hours. Although not being sure of being better off in work is one of the largest barriers to work among this group of lone parents, it is just one of many barriers identified in this survey. In addition, the findings suggest that lone parents find it difficult to balance work and family once they work 16 or more hours per week. As noted above, Universal Credit may help to encourage more lone parents to take up mini-jobs rather than not work at all. However, it may not just be the incentives in the benefit system that are preventing lone parents from working more than 16 hours per week (rather than around 16). Given the importance of balancing work and family, this suggests that lone parents will often need encouragement and support to start work of more than 16 hours per week, and to stay in that work.

8.5.5 Future research

As noted in the Introduction, the wider evaluation of LPO was reviewed and scaled back in response to the current fiscal climate. A single follow-up survey will now be conducted in early 2012. Participants in this research will be re-contacted, making it possible to explore:

- movements to JSA or other destinations;
- lone parents who enter work, the kinds of jobs they take, hours and work progression;
- some of the issues identified in this first survey, such as the role of ex-partners in supporting work, perceptions of optimum working hours for work-life balance, and how attitudes differ between those in and not in work; and
- how LPO may affect lone parents with a youngest child aged five.

Future research within the wider LPO evaluation, both quantitative and qualitative, will reflect those issues that emerge as pertinent to ongoing policy development, for example, with regard to Universal Credit.

Appendix A

Detailed analysis tables

Table A.1 School age, by number of children

	Column percentages				
	Number of children				Total %
	One %	Two %	Three %	Four or more %	
Primary-school-age children only	99	70	41	18	66
Secondary-school-age children	*	30	59	82	34
Base: All respondents	903	1,054	544	274	2,779

Table A.2 Type of illness or disability among children

Any children in household with:	Multiple responses included	
		%
Chest, breathing problem, asthma, bronchitis		53
Skin conditions, allergies		25
Learning difficulties		17
Stomach, liver, kidney or digestive problems		9
Problem with arms, legs, hands, feet, back and neck		8
Difficulty in hearing		8
Mental illness or phobia, panics or other nervous disorders		6
Difficulty in seeing		6
Heart, blood pressure or blood circulation problems		4
Depression, bad nerves		3
Epilepsy		2
Childhood congenital problems		2
Diabetes		1
Base: All respondents with a child with LSI		833

Table A.3 Reason for Special Educational Needs

Any children in household with:	<i>Multiple responses included</i>
	%
Learning difficulties	48
Behavioural problems	30
Speech and/or language difficulties/problems	25
Dyslexia	20
Emotional problems	19
ADHD/hyperactivity/lack of concentration	17
Social problems	11
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	6
Mental health problems/depression	5
Hearing impairment/deafness	5
Dyspraxia	4
Aspergers syndrome	4
Physical disability	3
Visual impairment/blindness	3
Dyscalculia	1
Multi-sensory impairment/deafblind	1
<i>Base: All respondents with a child with Special Educational Needs</i>	
	539

Table A.4 Proportion of lone parents and mothers with partners renting their home

	Rent from social landlord %	Rent from private landlord %	Owner-occupiers %	Other %	<i>Row percentages</i>
					<i>Base: All respondents</i>
LPO sample of lone parents (this survey)	67	25	7	2	2,779
Lone parents in GB population (FACS)	43	18	34	5	1,753
Mothers with partners in GB population (FACS)	12	7	79	2	4,123

Source for population data: FACS 2008.

Table A.5 Proportion of lone parents and mothers with partners with access to a vehicle and with a driving licence

	Row percentages		
	Have driving licence %	Access to car %	Base: All respondents
LPO sample of lone parents (this survey)	39	29	2,779
Lone parents in GB population (FACS)	61	55	1,753
Mothers with partners in GB population (FACS)	84	82	4,123

Source for population data: FACS 2008.

Table A.6 Current employment status

	Column percentages		
	Working while claiming IS %	Working, not claiming IS %	All respondents in work %
Employees	93	91	92
Self-employed	7	9	8
Base: All respondents in work, and giving an answer for employment status	187	95	287

Note: The total includes five respondents who were working and claiming JSA or ESA.

Table A.7 Current contract status (employees)

	Column percentages		
	Working while claiming IS %	Working, not claiming IS %	All respondents in work %
Permanent	80	75	79
Temporary	15	20	17
Fixed-term	5	5	5
Base: All respondents in work (employees), and giving an answer for contract status	173	85	263

Note: The total includes five respondents who were working and claiming JSA or ESA.

Table A.8 Size of current employer

	Column percentages		
	Working while claiming IS	Working, not claiming IS	All respondents in work
Less than 25 staff	50	61	53
25 to 499 staff	48	33	43
500 staff or more	2	6	4
<i>Base: All respondents in work (employees), and giving an answer for size of employer.</i>	172	84	260

Note: The total includes four respondents who were working and claiming JSA or ESA.

Table A.9 Standard industrial classification (SIC) of current work

	Column percentages		
	Working while claiming IS %	Working, not claiming IS %	Working age population %
Agriculture and fishing	0	0	1
Energy and water	1	0	2
Manufacturing	2	6	10
Construction	1	0	8
Distribution, hotels and restaurants	29	42	19
Transport and communications	1	4	9
Banking, finance and insurance	7	9	16
Health and social work (public admin, education and health)	50	35	31
Other services	9	4	6
<i>Base: All respondents in work (employees), and giving an answer for SIC</i>	188	94	n/a

Source: LPO survey 2010 and ONS/APS July 2009–June 2010 (GB).

Table A.10 Satisfaction with current job

	%
Very satisfied	47
Fairly satisfied	40
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	7
Fairly dissatisfied	3
Very dissatisfied	2
Don't know	1

Base: All currently in work (289).

Table A.11 Does a job prevent lone parents giving the time they want to their children?

	Working 16+ hours per week %	Working less than 16 hours per week %	Column percentages Total %
Always	7	4	5
Often	6	1	2
Sometimes	29	9	16
Hardly ever	20	13	16
Never	35	74	60
Don't know	4	0	2
<i>Base: All currently in work</i>	107	182	289

Table A.12 Availability of flexible arrangements at the workplace

	Multiple responses included %
Part-time work, allowing me to work fewer days per week	32
Part-time work, allowing me to work fewer hours per day	22
Flexi-time, so I can choose when to work my required hours	16
Working from home, at least some of the time	3
Job-sharing, where part-timers share one full-time job	9
Paid time off when the children are ill	19
Unpaid time off when the children are ill	28
None of these	16
Don't know	12
<i>Base: All currently in work as an employee</i>	263

Table A.13 Whether current employer offers any of the following benefits for any employees

	<i>Multiple responses included</i>
	%
Paid holidays	57
Sick pay	36
A car or van for your own private use	0
Creche or nursery at your workplace	3
Trade union membership	14
None of these	25
Don't know	7
<i>Base: All currently in work as an employee</i>	<i>263</i>

Table A.14 Whether childcare users paid for each type of childcare

	%	<i>Base: All using each type of childcare</i>
Nanny, au pair or childcarer in the home	-	5
Baby-sitter who came to home	57	49
Breakfast club or after-school club, on school/nursery school site	65	268
Breakfast club or after-school club, not on school/nursery school site	60	73
Holiday club/scheme	32	58
Ex-husband/wife/partner/the child's non-resident parent	1	257
The child's grandparent(s)	1	654
The child's older brother/sister	10	138
Another relative	5	288
A friend or neighbour	7	222

Table A.15 Whether respondents do anything in return for childcare, by type of childcare used

	Column percentages				
	Ex-husband/ wife/partner %	The child's grandparent(s) %	The child's older brother/ sister %	Another relative %	A friend or neighbour %
Look after their children	2	2	8	26	41
Do favour	5	18	10	18	22
Give gift or treat	2	23	28	16	15
Something else	1	3	3	3	3
Any of above	8	39	43	48	61
Do any of the above or pay	9	40	53	53	68
<i>Base: All using each type of childcare</i>	257	654	138	288	222

Table A.16 How often childcare arrangements break down

	Column percentages		
	Currently in work %	Previously in work %	Total %
Often	3	12	8
Sometimes	18	19	19
Rarely	80	69	73
<i>Base: All currently in work or in work since the birth of oldest child</i>	289	361	650

Note: the above table suggests that problems were more common in past, rather than current, jobs. However, these figures should be interpreted with caution as the differences may reflect issues relating to recall as well as actual experiences.

Table A.17 Respondents' attitudes to parenting, work and childcare

	Row percentages								
	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Don't want to answer	Does not apply to me
Having a job is the best way for me to be an independent person	82	37	45	11	5	1	2	*	-
I have always thought I would work	82	32	50	12	2	*	3	*	-
Children under five are happiest being looked after by their parents	78	41	37	15	5	*	1	*	-
It is always better if the parent can look after the child themselves	71	26	46	21	7	*	1	*	-
No one should ever feel badly about claiming social security benefits	70	22	48	19	6	1	3	*	-
If you work when your children are little you will miss out on seeing them grow and develop	68	31	37	20	9	1	1	0	-
Once you've got a job, it is important to hang on to it, even if you don't really like it	63	22	41	17	15	3	3	*	-
Working mums provide positive role models for their children	61	18	43	28	7	1	2	*	-
Most of my closest friends think mums should go out to work if they want to	60	11	49	26	9	1	4	1	-
Having almost any job is better than being unemployed	59	20	39	19	17	2	2	*	-
My job is to look after the home and family	59	20	39	25	13	2	1	*	-
If you live on social security benefits, everyone looks down on you	58	21	38	23	11	2	5	1	-
The government expects all lone parents to work	57	18	38	25	12	2	4	*	-
I might get a job one day but looking after my children is what I want to do now ¹	55	21	33	23	19	2	2	*	-

Continued

Table A.17 Continued

	Row percentages								
	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Don't want to answer	Does not apply to me
I always thought if I had children I would stay at home and look after them	50	17	33	26	19	2	2	1	-
Children do best if their mum stays home to look after them	49	17	32	34	14	1	2	*	-
Stay-at-home mums are not valued by society	45	17	29	24	21	4	5	*	-
I pay a lot of attention to what my parents think about how I bring up my children	44	15	29	20	20	5	1	2	7
It is not possible to work and put your children first	42	13	29	25	25	4	3	1	-
A job is alright, but I really want to be with my children at home	42	12	30	35	19	2	2	1	-
Most of my closest friends think mums should stay at home and look after their children	33	9	24	34	26	3	4	*	-
Working mothers have the best of both worlds	31	6	25	38	21	4	6	*	-
Combining work and family brings more problems than benefits	30	7	23	37	23	2	7	1	-
A person must have a job to feel a full member of society	29	6	23	32	30	5	3	*	-
Working for pay is more fulfilling than looking after the home and family	20	6	14	34	32	11	3	*	-
Children benefit from being looked after by other people	18	3	15	35	33	10	4	*	-
My mother thinks I should spend more time with my children	16	6	10	22	35	8	4	2	13

Base: All respondents who answered the self-completion section of the questionnaire (2,744).

¹ The base for this statement is all respondents not in work at the time of interview who answered the self-completion section (2,455).

Notes: Strongly agree/agree may not sum precisely due to rounding. '*' denotes less than 0.5% and '-' denotes not applicable.

Table A.18 Perceived barriers to employment for lone parents not in work

	Big barrier	Small barrier	Not a barrier	<i>Row percentages</i>
				<i>Base: All respondents not in work¹</i>
I would need a job where I could take time off at short notice to look after my child(ren)	64	24	12	2,357
There are few suitable job opportunities in the local area	45	32	23	2,351
I haven't got the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job I would want	41	27	32	2,362
I am not sure I would be financially better off in work	40	34	26	2,358
I am not prepared to leave my child(ren) in the care of anyone other than my family or close friends while I work	37	23	41	2,360
My family or close friends are not able, or live too far away, to provide childcare	36	21	43	2,357
I am worried I will not have enough time with my child(ren)	35	36	29	2,362
I want to look after my child(ren) myself or at home	33	33	35	2,361
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	30	29	41	2,345
My confidence is low at the moment	28	27	45	2,367
Employers aren't very family-friendly	25	35	40	2,344
I am concerned about leaving the security of benefits	19	32	49	2,365
I have personal or family troubles that need to be sorted out	19	18	64	2,362
I would have problems with transport to and from work	19	28	53	2,367
My child(ren) wouldn't like me to work	15	23	62	2,362
I have difficulties due to my health condition or disability	14	9	77	2,364
I care for someone who has a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulties	12	7	81	2,361
My parent/parents wouldn't like it if I worked	3	6	91	2,360
My husband/partner/ex-partner would not like it if I worked	2	2	96	2,357

¹ Bases exclude those who did not answer or answered 'don't know' which was less than 1% for all statements.

Table A.19 Perceived ‘big’ barriers to employment by whether looking for work

	Looking for work	Not looking, but expect to work in future	Do not expect to work in future	%
I would need a job where I could take time off at short notice to look after my child(ren)	60	68	65	
There are few suitable job opportunities in the local area	54	37	42	
I haven't got the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job I would want	37	43	49	
I am not sure I would be financially better off in work	37	42	48	
I am not prepared to leave my child(ren) in the care of anyone other than my family or close friends while I work	29	40	53	
My family or close friends are not able, or live too far away, to provide childcare	33	38	42	
I am worried I will not have enough time with my child(ren)	25	41	49	
I want to look after my child(ren) myself or at home	20	40	53	
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	29	31	34	
My confidence is low at the moment	23	33	30	
Employers aren't very family-friendly	25	23	35	
I am concerned about leaving the security of benefits	16	20	25	
I have personal or family troubles that need to be sorted out	13	24	22	
I would have problems with transport to and from work	17	21	25	
My child(ren) wouldn't like me to work	12	16	23	
I have difficulties due to my health condition or disability	7	17	27	
I care for someone who has a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulties	9	14	21	
My parent/parents wouldn't like it if I worked	3	3	4	
My husband/partner/ex-partner would not like it if I worked	2	1	4	
<i>Base: All respondents not in work</i>	1,062	1,147	245	

Table A.20 Factors that affect lone parents' ability to stay in work

			Row percentages
	Big factor	Smaller factor	Not a factor
I am not sure that I am better off financially in work	26	29	44
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	22	17	60
I hadn't anticipated all the extra things I would need to spend money on now that I'm in work	20	28	51
I am worried I do not have enough time with my child(ren)	17	25	58
I find it stressful combining work and family life	14	34	52
I am finding it difficult to adjust to having money coming in every month rather than every week	13	21	65
My child(ren) don't like me working	12	21	67
I can't see this job going anywhere, there are no promotion prospects	11	25	64
Employers aren't very family-friendly	11	6	82
I have problems with transport to and from work	10	12	77
There is a lot of pressure in my present job to work longer hours, stay late or do overtime	9	13	79
I'm not confident my childcare arrangements will continue	9	11	79
My employer is not very family-friendly	8	10	82
I am not enjoying working as much as I thought I would	7	13	80
I have difficulties working due to my health conditions or disability	4	8	87
My confidence has taken a knock since I started work	3	7	90
My parent/parents don't like me working	2	6	92
My husband/partner/ex-partner does not like it if I work	*	3	94

Base: All respondents in work (291).

Appendix B

Factor analysis methodology and results

Factor analysis is used to uncover factors underlying a set of variables and can be used for a number of purposes. In this research it was used to reduce a larger number of variables into a smaller number of factors. These variables derive from the ‘Choices and Constraints’ question set which has been used in a number of surveys including the Families and Children’s Study. The questionnaire module purposely uses several questions to measure similar issues, such as attitudes to parenting, work and childcare and therefore is best explored by reducing the questions down into several salient factors.

Attitudes to parenting, work and childcare

This survey of lone parents included a set of questions on attitudes to parenting, work and childcare. The questions were part of a self-completion module in a face-to-face interview with lone parents claiming Income Support. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a range of attitude statements using a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree).

Factor analysis was carried out on 24 of these attitude statements in order to see if they could be reduced to a smaller number of underlying factors.³⁸ Only respondents who gave an opinion to each of the attitude statements were included in the factor analysis. Respondents who answered ‘don’t know’ or ‘don’t want to answer’ to any of the statements were excluded from this analysis.³⁹

The method of factor analysis used and reported here was Principle Components Analysis (PCA). It was assumed that the underlying factors could be correlated given that the attitudes were about parenting, work and childcare. Therefore, the rotation method used was an oblique rotation (direct oblimin) with Kaiser Normalisation, as this allowed the extracted factors to be correlated (Field 2009, p.644). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO = .86. Bartlett’s test of sphericity χ^2 (276) = 11,427.7, $p < .001$, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Six components had eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of one and in combination explained 54 per cent of the total variance found in these 24 attitude statements. Having interpreted the findings and re-run the analysis to produce different numbers of factors, it was decided to keep a final model of four factors as the results seemed sensible, meaningful and useful for analysis in this research. The final model explained 45 per cent of variance.

³⁸ The following three statements were also excluded from this analysis; ‘I might get a job one day but looking after my children is what I want to do now’, ‘I pay a lot of attention to what my parents think about how I bring up my children’ and ‘My mother thinks I should spend more time with my children’. The first statement was removed because it was asked only of respondents not in work at the time of the interview. The other two statements did not apply to around one in ten respondents.

³⁹ As a result the base for this analysis was 1,965 respondents.

Table B.1 shows the final factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same components suggest that component A1 represents parental childcare-focused attitudes, component A2 employment-focused attitudes, A3 social stigma of benefits and A4 motivation to balance work and parenting. The descriptions applied to the factors deliberately simplify more complex information. In order to fully understand the underlying factors, all items associated with a particular factor must be examined.

Table B.1 Summary of factor analysis results from the parenting, work and childcare statements

	Factor A1	Factor A2	Factor A3	Factor A4
Parental childcare focused:				
It's always better if the parent can look after the child themselves	.77	.04	-.09	-.01
Children do best if their mum/parents stays home to look after them	.76	.05	-.10	-.05
Children under five are happiest being looked after by their parents	.74	.08	-.13	.13
A job is all right, but I really want to be with my children at home	.69	-.04	-.01	-.14
My job is to look after the home and family	.66	-.06	-.03	-.06
I always thought that if I had children I would stay at home and look after them	.63	-.05	-.07	-.07
If you work when your children are little you will miss out on seeing them grow and develop	.59	-.05	-.24	-.02
No one should ever feel badly about claiming social security benefits	.44	-.06	-.20	.18
Employment focused:				
Having almost any job is better than being unemployed	.03	.83	.09	-.06
Once you've got a job, it's important to hang on to it, even if you don't really like it	.02	.76	.00	-.13
Having a job is the best way for me to be an independent person	.08	.53	-.06	.35
Working for pay is more fulfilling than looking after the home and family	-.28	.42	-.08	.09
Social stigma of benefits:				
Stay-at-home mums are not valued by society	.08	-.15	-.71	.13
If you live on social security benefits, everyone looks down on you	-.09	.08	-.63	.11
It is not possible to put your children first, and to work	.15	-.04	-.57	-.16
The government expects all lone parents to work	.11	.02	-.41	.01
A person must have a job to feel a full member of society	-.12	.35	-.44	.11
Combining work and family brings more problems than benefits	.24	-.08	-.45	-.28

Continued

Table B.1 Continued

	Factor A1	Factor A2	Factor A3	Factor A4
Motivation to balance work and parenting:				
Most of my closest friends think mums should go out to work if they want to	.11	-.06	-.04	.70
Working mums/parents provide positive role models for their children	-.01	.25	-.02	.60
Working mothers/parents have the best of both worlds	-.07	.37	.21	.46
Percent of variance explained	21.5	12.5	5.9	5.0

Notes:

1. This table presents the extracted factor loadings (regression coefficients) of each variable and factor as displayed in the pattern matrix generated using SPSS. The closer a factor loading is to one, the stronger the relationship between the attitude statement and the factor. Similar factor loadings were present in the structure matrix.
2. The four factors extracted account for 45 per cent of variance in the attitude statements.
3. Statements with a factor loading of less than 0.4 have been suppressed in this table as the statements were not strongly associated with any of the four factors. The suppressed statements were ‘Children benefit from being looked after by other people’, ‘I have always thought I would work’ and ‘Most of my closest friends think mums should stay at home and look after their children’.

Reliability

Before subgroup analysis was carried out using these four factors, the reliability was tested by calculating the reliability coefficients of each factor (Cronbach’s Alphas):

- Factor A1 parental childcare focused: .84
- Factor A2 employment focused: .64
- Factor A3 social stigma of benefits: .60
- Factor A4 motivation to balancing work and parenting: .54

The overall reliability was good as three of the factors had reliability coefficients of .60 or above. This is often the case when five items or more per factor are used.

Relationships between factors

Most factors were correlated with all other factors, meaning that attitudes towards parenting, work and childcare are related. The only exception being that attitudes related to the social stigma of benefits were not significantly correlated with motivation to balance work and family life. In particular Table B.2 shows:

- employment-focused respondents were also likely to agree with attitude statements related to balancing work and family life;
- parental childcare-focused respondents (who agreed with statements related to caring for their children themselves) were also likely to agree with attitude statements related to the social stigma of benefits.

Table B.2 Correlations between factors underlying attitudes

	Parental childcare focused	Employment focused	Social stigma of benefits	Motivation to balance work and family life
Parental childcare focused	1	-.178	.361	-.274
Employment focused	-.178	1	.153	.414
Social stigma of benefits	.361	.153	1	Not significant
Motivation to balance work and family life	-.274	.414	Not significant	1

Note: the correlation coefficients presented here are based on the mean scores of the items (attitude statements) associated with each factor. Therefore, the negative factor loadings of A3 in Table B.1 have no bearing on the interpretation of the correlation coefficients presented here.

Barriers to employment

Respondents who were out of work at the time of the interview were presented with a series of cards each inscribed with statements about barriers to employment that may influence their decision to going back to work or entering employment in the future. Each respondent who was out of work was asked to sort the 19 cards into three groups; those that were not a factor, smaller factors and big factors. From these responses a three-point scale for each of the 19 factors was created. Respondents who did not place all 19 factors were excluded from this analysis.

Factor analysis was run on these 19 statements about barriers to employment to see if they represented a smaller number of underlying factors. The method of factor analysis used and reported here was PCA with oblique rotation (direct oblimin with Kaiser Normalisation). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, $KMO = .81$. Bartlett's test of sphericity $X^2 (171) = 6,406$, $p < .001$, indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data. Five components had eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of one and in combination explained 48% of the variance. Given the large sample size (2,276) and Kaiser's criterion of five components, this is the number of components that were retained in the final analysis. Table B.3 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that cluster on the same components suggest that component P1 represents childcare constraints, component P2 personal constraints, component P3 'parenting as a choice', component P4 job concerns and P5 peer pressure.

Table B.3 Summary of factor analysis results from the ‘barriers to employment’ statements

	Factor P1	Factor P2	Factor P3	Factor P4	Factor P5
Childcare constraints:					
There isn't enough suitable, affordable childcare around here	.70	-.02	.01	.00	.09
Employers aren't very family-friendly	.64	.09	-.02	.06	.01
My family or close friends are not able, or live too far away, to provide childcare	.58	.08	-.16	.11	-.00
There are few suitable job opportunities in the local area	.56	-.11	.21	-.16	-.08
I would need a job where I could take time off at short notice to look after my child(ren)	.50	.01	-.37	.03	-.19
I would have problems with transport to and from work	.39	.03	.00	-.21	.19
Personal constraints:					
I have personal or family troubles that need to be sorted out	.03	.76	-.03	-.07	-.07
I have difficulties due to my health condition or disability	-.04	.66	.06	-.13	.06
I care for someone who has a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulties	.10	.59	-.06	.32	.20
‘Parenting as a choice’:					
I want to look after my child(ren) myself or at home	-.05	.03	-.85	-.03	-.09
I am worried I will not have enough time with my child(ren)	.14	-.02	-.73	-.06	-.08
I am not prepared to leave my child(ren) in the care of anyone other than my family or close friends while I work	-.02	.04	-.72	-.03	.04
My child(ren) wouldn't like me to work	-.04	-.07	-.59	-.07	.21

Continued

Table B.3 Continued

	Factor P1	Factor P2	Factor P3	Factor P4	Factor P5
Job concerns:					
I am concerned about leaving the security of benefits	-.05	.03	-.17	-.66	.07
I haven't got the qualifications or experience to get the kind of job I would want	.02	-.01	.00	-.57	.08
My confidence is low at the moment	.02	.44	.03	-.54	-.16
I am not sure I would be financially better off in work	.26	-.05	-.16	-.48	-.03
Peer pressure:					
My husband/partner/ex-partner would not like it if I worked	-.01	.08	.03	-.03	.73
My parent/parents wouldn't like it if I worked	.03	-.01	.05	.03	.73
Eigen values					
Percentage of variance explained					

1. This table presents the extracted factor loadings (regression coefficients) of each variable and factor as displayed in the pattern matrix generated using SPSS. Similar factor loadings were present in the structure matrix.
2. The five factors extracted account for 48% of variance in the 19 statements.

Before subgroup analysis was carried out using these four factors the reliability was tested by calculating the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of each factor:

- Factor P1 childcare constraints: .64
- Factor P2 personal constraints: .49
- Factor P3 'parenting as a choice': .74
- Factor P4 job concerns: .52
- Factor P5 peer pressure: .37

The overall reliability was good and higher for the factors related to childcare constraints (P1) and 'parenting as a choice' (P3).

Relationships between factors

All factors were positively correlated with one another. This means that a person for whom one barrier was an issue was also more likely to report other barriers to employment (see Table B.4). While all the correlations were significant, none were over .40. However, the higher correlations were between 'parenting as a choice', childcare constraints and job concerns which were also the more reliable factors (discussed above). This suggests that respondents who report childcare constraints to employment are also more likely to report job concerns and want to look after their children themselves ('parenting as a choice').

Table B.4 Correlations between factors underlying perceived barriers to employment

	Childcare constraints	Personal constraints	'Parenting as a choice'	Job concerns	Peer pressure
Childcare constraints	1	.127	.364	.349	.083
Personal constraints	.127	1	.158	.225	.231
'Parenting as a choice'	.364	.158	1	.305	.146
Job concerns	.349	.225	.305	1	.098
Peer pressure	.083	.231	.146	.098	1

Note: the correlation coefficients presented here are based on the mean scores of the items (barrier to employment statements) associated with each factor. Therefore, the negative factor loadings of 'parenting as a choice' and 'job concerns' in Table B.4 have no bearing on the interpretation of the correlation coefficients presented here.

Appendix C

Technical report

Sample design and selection procedures

The sample is based on a representative sample of customers across Great Britain (GB) (England, Scotland and Wales).

Lone parents in roll-out groups 16 and 17 were the subject of the survey. In group 16, Income Support (IS) end dates are scheduled between January and April 2011. In group 17, the IS end dates range from January to October 2011. In order that respondents would be interviewed a similar length of time before their IS end date, the sample was limited to those with an IS end date between 1 January and 31 March 2011.

In order to plan fieldwork, Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) were selected by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in January 2010 from the January 2010 extract of IS claims in the National Benefits Database. This identified all customers with an IS end date between January and March 2011 who were receiving IS in September 2009 (i.e. 15–18 months before their end date). The following lone parent customers were selected:

- those on IS in Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) roll-out groups 16 and 17;
- those not exempt from LPO;
- those due to lose IS entitlement in the period January – March 2011;
- those still in receipt of IS;
- those who had not been sampled as part of the LPO qualitative evaluation;
- those who did not live in the Progression to Work Pathfinder areas⁴⁰;
- those who, as far as known from the anonymised data, the DWP had address information for⁴¹.

DWP ran frequencies by postcode sector and postcode district, and this information was used to create PSUs. Initial postcode analysis carried out by DWP indicated that the sample population was relatively un-clustered. Therefore, the sample could not be based on individual postcode sectors and the PSUs needed to be based on larger areas. Each PSU consisted of a cluster of neighbouring sectors merged together to form a single area. Prior to selection of PSUs, the clustered file was sorted by Government Office Region; within each region the file was further sorted into three groups based on the index of multiple deprivation; within each of these groups the file was then sorted by the proportion of parents in the PSU who were lone parents (based on data from the 2001 Census). PSUs were then selected at random with probability proportional to the number of eligible lone parents within the PSU (according to the DWP counts). In total, 120 PSUs were selected for inclusion in the survey.

⁴⁰ South London, Nottinghamshire, Staffordshire and Tees Valley.

⁴¹ Anonymised data was used to draw the sample and this contains no address or telephone information apart from postcode. When personal details were added, cases with no contact information and cases where the claimant has been interviewed for another research project in the last three years were removed.

The customers identified in the above selection process had an IS end date between January and March 2011 and were receiving IS in September 2009. However, the intention was to ensure that selected customers were still receiving IS no more than 12 months before their IS end date (i.e. in some cases at the end of March 2010). Therefore, DWP made the final sample selection from the April 2010 extract of IS claims in the National Benefits Database, based on customers still receiving IS on 1 April 2010. In practice, this meant stripping out those that were no longer receiving IS from those originally identified.

A target of 2,230 interviews was set for the survey. In order to achieve this, 3,776 cases were selected, as well as an additional reserve sample of 727 (4,503 in total). Within each of the 120 selected PSUs, a maximum of 42 eligible customers was to be selected. For PSUs with less than 42 eligible customers, all eligible customers were selected. For those PSUs with more than 42 customers, the sample was stratified by length of current IS claim and a '1 in n' selection was made. DWP supplied the contact details for these cases. For the mainstage fieldwork, interviewers were issued with a maximum of 32 addresses. The additional customers were held as a reserve sample.

In the event, all cases (main and reserve) were issued for fieldwork. The decision about whether to use the reserve sample was made on 23 June. At that stage of fieldwork there were 1,252 completed cases with 2,075 outstanding and it was therefore decided to issue the reserve sample to ensure the target number of interviews was achieved.

Pilot survey

A pilot 'dress-rehearsal' of the survey procedures and instruments took place over two and a half weeks in March 2010. The pilot aimed to provide information about contacting procedures, interview length and interview structure. Interviewers also provided feedback on question wording and routing where appropriate. The findings also gave some indication of likely response rates at the main stage.

The pilot sample was drawn from postcode sectors/districts that were not selected in the main sample. For the pilot, a sample of 180 lone parents was selected. These were geographically spread across six areas (postcode sectors) in Britain: Bootle, Dagenham, Glasgow, North Somerset (Highbridge and Weston-Super-Mare), Portsmouth and South-west London (Streatham). For the majority of sample cases, eligibility was the same as for the main sample. However, a small sample of new/repeat Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants was included for the pilot, in order to make sure that we tested questions about JSA.

Cases selected for the pilot were sent a letter on 23 February, which informed them about the study and instructed those who did not wish to take part to contact the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). Four people chose to opt out of the study (two per cent of the issued sample). After the opt out, a total of 176 addresses were issued to interviewers. The assignment size for interviewers ranged from 27 to 34 addresses. Interviewers were asked to achieve as many interviews as possible.

The pilot briefing took place on 4 March with an interviewer debriefing on 30 March 2010. Both the briefing and debriefing were conducted face to face. Interviewers were provided with background information about the purpose of the survey, and trained in how to administer the questionnaire. All interviewers had a set of project instructions, which provided further information about the survey and key definitions and rules. For the debriefing, interviewers were asked to complete a Pilot Evaluation Form, which summarised observations and any problems encountered during fieldwork. This formed the basis of the discussion at the debriefing.

A definitive outcome was obtained for 159 cases at the pilot (90 per cent of the issued sample). There were 84 productive interviews, 27 refusals and ten other unproductive cases. There were 17 cases left uncovered; that is a final outcome was not obtained even if contact had been made.

Table C.1 Pilot outcomes

Outcome	Number	% of issued	% of covered
Issued	176		
Outstanding	17	10	
Productive interview	84	48	53
No contact	31	18	19
Refusal	23	13	14
Other unproductive	10	6	6
Unknown eligibility – no contact	9	5	6
Ineligible	2	1	1

Following the pilot survey, the research team made a number of modifications to the questionnaire and survey process. These included: amendments to questions, particularly concerning childcare; amendments to question routing; and issuing a leaflet describing the research for interviewers to leave with respondents.

Questionnaire programming and testing

The mainstage questionnaire was thoroughly tested using Blaise, the programming language used for computer-assisted interviewing, to ensure that it performed correctly. In particular, the following aspects of the questionnaire were tested:

- the accuracy and sense of questionnaire wording and response options;
- the accuracy of show-card references;
- appropriate instructions to interviewers were included, where required, in the standard format (i.e. in block capitals) or in help screens;
- the accuracy of range and consistency checks and the identification of additional checks to be programmed;
- the questionnaire coped with different scenarios correctly, that is to say that any routing, range or consistency checks were appropriate for all foreseeable circumstances.

Fieldwork procedures

All lone parents sampled were sent a letter giving them an opportunity to opt out of the survey. This is a standard procedure used when a sample is drawn from benefit records, and means that only the addresses of sample members who have not opted out are issued to interviewers to contact. The letter on DWP headed paper provided basic information about the project and emphasised that any information provided by respondents would be treated in strict confidence. A Welsh translation was provided for respondents living in Wales. After removing those cases that opted-out during the specified time period from the in-scope sample, cases were issued to interviewers.

A series of eight briefing sessions were held between 17 and 25 May 2010. NatCen researchers conducted the briefings. Two of the briefings were held in London with the remainder taking place in Birmingham, Bristol, Brentwood, Glasgow, Leeds and Manchester. In total, 127 interviewers were briefed and worked on the study. All were trained members of NatCen's interviewing panel.

During fieldwork, interviewers were instructed to interview the person named on the Address Record Form (ARF) and to whom the advance letter was addressed to. If the named respondent had moved, interviewers were asked to attempt to trace the respondent to their new address.

Respondents who took part in the survey (at both the pilot and main stage) received a £10 voucher by way of thanks for their participation in the survey. The voucher was given in recognition of the time the respondent had devoted to helping with the study and were handed over by the interviewer, usually at the end of the interview.

Fieldwork was carried out between 27 May and 25 August 2010. Fieldwork was planned so that the majority of interviews were conducted before the school summer holidays; a total of 2,415 interviews were completed by 25 July (87 per cent). Fieldwork progress for each month is shown below.

Table C.2 Fieldwork progress by month

Work completed by the end of...	Number	%
May	46	1.7
June	1563	56.2
July	941	33.9
August	229	8.2
Total productive cases	2,779	100

The final Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) outputs for each interview were transmitted to the NatCen via telephone modem. The outcome code⁴² for each case was integrated into a database that was essentially the sample file for the survey. With this information, fieldwork progress could be updated on a daily basis. This information was reported on a weekly basis to DWP. Using this information the researchers were able to identify potential problems with fieldwork. This data influenced decisions about re-issuing unproductive cases and was used to inform the quality control exercise.

Interviewer workload and interview length

The mean number of productive interviews carried out per interviewer was 23, with 41 being the maximum. The average duration of each interview is shown in Table C.3.

Table C.3 Average interview duration

	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	N
Average interview length (minutes)	47.5	45.0	18	150	2,776

⁴² An outcome code is a three-digit number that classifies the result of contact with each case. The code summarises information about the case, such as its eligibility to the study and the outcome of interview. The outcome code is recorded on the ARF.

The mean interview length was 48 minutes and the median was 45 minutes. Of all productive interviews, two per cent lasted 90 minutes or more.

There were certain respondents that tended to have longer interviews: those with language difficulties; those with many children (in particular affecting the childcare section); and those who wanted to discuss their particular circumstances in detail.

Fieldwork quality control procedures

During the course of fieldwork a small number of unproductive cases were re-issued to interviewers. This is standard practice on NatCen projects. In total, 24 cases were sent back to interviewers. From the cases re-issued, productive interviews were achieved in 54 per cent of cases, or with 13 lone parents.

As with all surveys conducted by NatCen, a programme of back checking interviewer work was undertaken. Periodically throughout fieldwork, random subsets of respondents were telephoned to check that the interviews were conducted correctly. If they could not be contacted by telephone, they were sent a postal questionnaire. The total number selected amounted to ten per cent of those interviewed. Each main respondent selected was thanked for their co-operation and invited to comment on the survey and the way it was carried out.

In total, 547 respondents were selected for telephone contact and 313 of these were contacted. A further 48 respondents were sent a postal questionnaire with 9 returning this. In total, 12 per cent of those interviewed were successfully checked and in all cases respondents confirmed that the interview had been conducted correctly.

Fieldwork outcomes

From the total of 4,503 cases selected for the survey, 244 opted out of the survey after receiving the advance letter (6.5 per cent of the selected sample), a relatively low number for this type of study.

Table C.4 presents the outcomes for the issued sample. Of the 4,259 issued cases two persons had deceased. This is considered a frame error as these persons were no longer part of the target population and are not taken into account in response rate calculations.

In total, 2,779 interviews were achieved (including three partial interviews), giving an overall response rate of 62.3 per cent. This was well in excess of the target of 2,230 interviews. Unsuccessful outcomes comprised six per cent who were not living at the listed address and could not be traced, 11 per cent who could not be contacted after intensive efforts (a minimum of five personal calls), and 18 per cent who refused either to an interviewer or made contact with NatCen's head office to refuse.

Table C.4 Main fieldwork outcomes

	All cases		Main sample		Reserve sample	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Issued cases	4,503		3,776		727	
Outcome not finalised	0		0		0	
Covered cases	4,503	100.0	3,776	100.0	727	100.0
Ineligible cases	45	0.1	37	0.0	8	0.0
Eligible cases	4,458		3,739		719	
Productive cases:						
Full interview with main respondent	2,776	62.3	2,354	63.0	422	58.7
Partial interview with main respondent	3	0.1	2	0.1	1	0.0
Total productives	2,779	62.3	2,356	63.0	423	58.8
Unproductive cases:						
Opt out before fieldwork	244	5.5	197	5.3	47	6.5
Opt out during fieldwork	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Refusal to Head Office	56	1.3	47	1.3	9	1.3
Refusal to interviewer	624	14.0	544	14.5	80	11.1
Non-contact	406	9.1	324	8.7	82	11.4
Untraced movers	254	5.7	208	5.6	46	6.4
Other unproductive	88	2.0	57	1.5	31	4.3
Eligibility unconfirmed	7	0.2	6	0.2	1	0.1

Across both samples there were 624 refusals by eligible respondents. The majority of these refusals were personal refusals by the respondent to the interviewer (369 cases). There were a small number of cases (ten) where another resident of the household refused on behalf of an eligible respondent. A total of 245 refusals were broken appointments where the interviewer was unable to re-contact the respondent.

Response rates

The overall response rate – that is the proportion of (eligible) lone parents who took part in a main interview – can be presented in a number of ways. The response rates are listed firstly excluding those that opted out of the study and then including the opt outs:

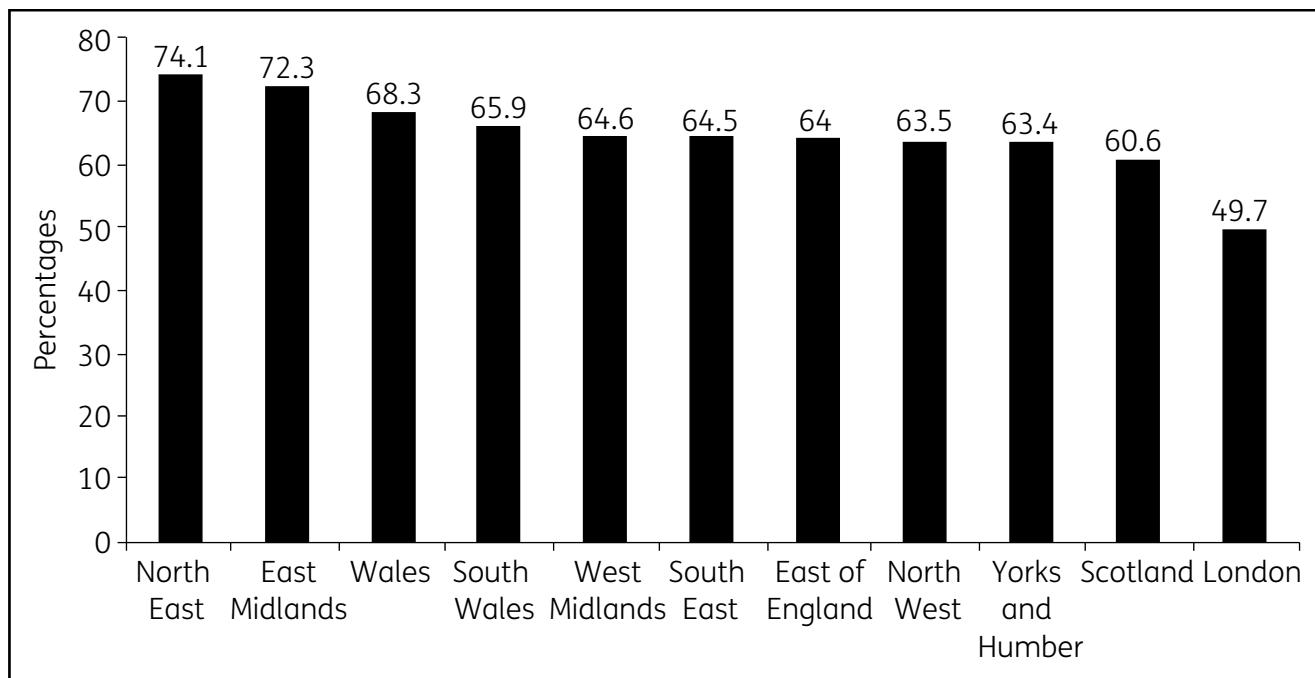
- The **overall response rate** describes the percentage of respondents that were interviewed excluding those that were ineligible to take part. The overall response rate was 66.0 per cent. Overall response was higher for the mainstage sample than the reserve sample (66.6 and 63.0 respectively). When opt outs were included the overall response fell to 62.3.
- The **full response rate** describes the percentage of full interviews with respondents (it excludes partial interviews). The full response rate was 65.9 per cent and, as with the overall response rate, was higher for the mainstage sample (66.5 compared to 62.9 for the reserve sample). When opt outs were taken into account it was 62.3 per cent.
- The **co-operation rate** describes how many of those respondents who were contacted agreed to take part in a main interview. Those who could not be contacted or were ineligible are excluded from the calculation. The number of lone parents participating in a main interview is divided by the number of addresses contacted by the interviewer (the contact rate). The co-operation rate

was 78.3 per cent excluding opt outs and 73.3 per cent when these were included. The contact rate was slightly higher for the main sample: 73.6 compared to 71.7 for the reserve sample including opt outs and 78.4 and 77.9 excluding opt outs.

- The **contact rate** was calculated by dividing the number of addresses contacted by interviewers by the number of issued addresses. The contact rate is an indicator of the quality of the contact details from the sampling frames. The contact rate was high (84.2 per cent). When opt outs were included the contact rate was 85.1 per cent.
- The **refusal rate** describes how many respondents refused to take part in the survey. When opt outs were excluded the refusal rate was 16.1 per cent. This rose to 20.7 per cent when they were included.
- The **eligibility rate** describes the percentage of eligible cases. The eligibility rate was very high (99.0 per cent) which is what would be expected for a named sample.

Figure C.1 summarises survey outcomes across GOR. Overall, the rate of productive interviews achieved was highest in North East (74.1 per cent) and East Midlands (both 72.3 per cent). London had the lowest productive interview rate (49.7 per cent). This finding is consistent with other similar studies.

Figure C.1 Outcome by Government Office Region



Weighting

Background and selection weights

As noted above, the lone parent counts used to merge and select the PSUs were from January 2010. The flow of lone parents on and off of benefits meant the number of eligible cases within the PSU in April 2010, when individuals were selected, was different. This meant that the sample design was not self weighting, since selection probabilities for lone parents varied (although the difference was small). Selection weights were needed as a result.

These selection weights were the product of the PSU and individual selection probabilities. The PSU selection probability was equal to $120 \times n_c/N_c$, where n_c is the lone parent count in the PSU and N_c is the total lone parent count for GB. The individual selection probability was then $42/n_a$, where n_a is the actual count per PSU.

In 38 PSUs the lone parents were selected with probability equal to one. This is because the actual count turned out to be much lower than the initial count and all eligible cases within the PSU were selected.

Non-response weights

A model-based weighting technique was used to develop the non-response weights, where response behaviour is modelled using data from the sampling frame. Ineligible households (deadwood) were not included in the non-response modelling⁴³.

A bivariate analysis was used to identify variables on the sampling frame that were significantly related to response⁴⁴. The significant variables were then used to develop a non-response model. Response behaviour was modelled using logistic regression. A logistic regression models the relationship between an outcome variable (in this case response to the LPO interview) and a set of predictor variables. The predictor variables were a set of socio-demographic respondent and household characteristics from the benefits database. The variables used to model non-response were: the lone parent's age, ethnicity, duration for which they had been claiming benefit, whether or not they had a disability, age of the lone parent's youngest child, whether they had claimed any previous benefits, region and the total number of children in the household. The data were weighted by the selection weights during modelling. The only predictive variables in the model were region and lone parent ethnicity. None of the other variables were significantly related to outcome.

The model generated a predicted probability for each respondent. This is the probability the respondent would take part in the interview, given the characteristics of the respondent and the household. Respondents with characteristics associated with non-response (such as living in London) are under-represented in the sample and will receive a low predicted probability. The non-response weights are then generated as the inverse of the predicted probabilities; hence respondents who had a low predicted probability get a larger weight, increasing their representation in the sample.

Calibration

When the weights from the non-response model were applied to the data they brought the distribution of the respondents very close to that of the population. A final step in the weighting was to calibrate the weights from the non-response model. This method takes the weights generated by the non-response model and adjusts them using an iterative procedure. The resulting weighting factors, when applied to the data, will make the survey estimates exactly match a set of population estimates for a set of key variables. The population estimates in this instance are taken from the selected sample, weighted by the selection weights. The issued sample, weighted by the selection weights, will be representative of the overall population of interest, hence weighting to these estimates will make the achieved sample representative of the population. The key variables used in the weighting were; the lone parent's ethnicity, age, title, region and number of children

⁴³ There were 52 individuals with ineligible outcome codes; these individuals were dropped from the weighting. Ineligible outcome codes include households where the individual was deceased, had moved outside GB or had moved and no follow up address could be found.

⁴⁴ Significance was tested using cross tabs and a chi square test.

in the household. The profile of the unweighted sample was generally close to that of the overall population which indicates that the impact of non-response on levels of bias in the sample was small. Once the non-response weights are applied the distributions of population and sample are very close.

Sample efficiency

Adding weights to a sample can affect the sample efficiency. If the weights are very variable (i.e. they have very high and/or very low values) the weighted estimates will have a larger variance. More variance means standard errors are larger and confidence intervals are wider, so there is less certainty over how close the estimates are to the true population value.

The affect of the sample design on the precision of survey estimates is indicated by the effective sample size (n_{eff}). The effective sample size measures the size of an (unweighted) simple random sample that would have provided the same precision (standard error) as the design being implemented. If the effective sample size is close to the actual sample size then we have an efficient design with a good level of precision. The lower the effective sample size, the lower the level of precision. The efficiency of a sample is given by the ratio of the effective sample size to the actual sample size. The range of the weights, the effective sample size and sample efficiency for both sets of weights are given in Table C.5. The efficiency of the LPO sample is high at 97 per cent, which means the impact of the weights on the precision of survey estimates is very small.

Table C.5 Range of weights and sample efficiency

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	N	Effective sample size	Efficiency %
Final calibrated weight	0.61	1.90	1.00	2,779	2,685	96.6
Weight from the non-response model	0.64	1.76	1.00	2,779	2,691	96.8
Selection weight	0.73	1.23	1.00	4,503	4,453	98.9

Table C.6 Weighted distributions of sample

	All cases (140 PSUs) weighted by selection weight %	All issued (120 PSUs) weighted by selection weight %	Respondents weighted by selection weight %	Respondents weighted by weight from non- response model %	Respondents weighted by final calibrated weight %
Claim duration since May 2010 (in years)					
1	12.6	12.8	12.7	12.5	12.5
2	15.4	15.4	15.8	15.6	15.5
3	10.3	10.1	10.3	10.1	10.0
4	7.7	7.6	8.1	8.1	7.9
5	6.9	6.9	7.7	7.7	7.7
6	8.0	8.0	7.6	7.7	7.7
7	12.3	12.5	11.8	11.8	11.9
8	6.8	6.7	6.3	6.4	6.5
9	3.9	4.0	4.1	4.2	4.3
10	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.4
11+	12.9	12.8	12.5	12.6	12.6
Disability flag for lone parent					
Not disabled	86.9	87.1	87.5	87.5	87.6
Disabled	13.1	12.9	12.5	12.5	12.4
Ethnic group of lone parent					
White	74.4	73.9	77.4	73.9	74.4
Black or black British	6.7	6.9	6.1	6.9	6.7
Asian or Asian British	4.7	4.6	3.7	4.6	4.7
Mixed	1.8	1.8	1.6	1.9	1.8
Chinese or other ethnic group	2.4	2.5	1.7	2.4	2.4
Prefer not to say/unknown	10.1	10.2	9.5	10.2	10.1
Government Office Region					
North East	3.2	3.8	4.5	3.8	3.2
North West	14.5	14.7	15.0	14.8	14.5
Yorkshire and The Humber	8.9	8.6	8.7	8.5	8.9
East Midlands	4.8	4.7	5.6	4.8	4.8
West Midlands	8.4	8.0	8.5	8.0	8.4
East of England	9.7	9.9	10.1	9.9	9.7
London	18.0	18.6	14.6	18.3	18.0
South East	12.1	11.4	11.9	11.5	12.1
South West	7.4	7.8	8.3	7.7	7.4
Wales	4.9	4.8	5.2	4.8	4.9
Scotland	8.1	7.8	7.6	7.8	8.1

Continued

Table C.6 Continued

	All cases (140 PSUs) weighted by selection weight %	All issued (120 PSUs) weighted by selection weight %	Respondents weighted by selection weight %	Respondents weighted by weight from non- response model %	Respondents weighted by final calibrated weight %
Lone parent current age – grouped					
20-25	8.6	8.7	8.2	8.1	8.6
26-29	21.5	21.4	21.4	21.1	21.5
30-34	24.2	24.0	24.1	23.9	24.2
35-59	21.8	21.8	22.0	22.3	21.8
40-44	15.9	16.0	16.0	16.1	15.9
45+	8.1	8.1	8.3	8.5	8.1
Number of children in household					
1	73.4	73.6	74.2	73.8	73.4
2	20.9	20.8	20.0	20.2	20.9
3+	5.7	5.7	5.8	6.0	5.7
Age in years of youngest child					
6	69.3	69.5	69.7	69.5	69.6
7	30.7	30.5	30.3	30.5	30.4
Sex of claimant					
Male	4.6	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.7
Female	95.4	95.2	95.1	95.2	95.3
Lone parent has previous benefit claims					
No	32.6	33.0	31.8	32.4	32.3
Yes	67.4	67.0	68.2	67.6	67.7
Lone parent title					
Miss	64.4	64.2	64.4	63.6	64.4
Mr	4.6	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.6
Mrs	23.5	23.7	23.3	24.0	23.5
Ms	7.6	7.4	7.5	7.7	7.6
Base (unweighted)	5,280	4,503	2,779	2,779	2,779

Coding, editing and checking of data.

Checks on the data were conducted at two separate stages in the collection and production of the data. Some data validation was carried out in the first stage by interviewers using the CAPI program in the field. Secondly, more complex checks, which may have proved time consuming and detrimental to the successful completion of the interview, were carried out at NatCen's offices.

Interviewer checks in the CAPI program allowed interviewers to clarify and query any data discrepancies directly with the respondent. The CAPI program applied range and consistency error checks extensively throughout the questionnaire. Where a check was triggered the interviewer often opened and recorded a note explaining the respondent's situation.

For each productive interview a 'fact sheet' was produced for data editors and the research team to use. This provided a concise summary of the respondent and key data from the interview to alert editors to possible errors or inconsistencies that needed to be dealt with at a later stage. A typical fact sheet contained a listing of the respondent's details, key data items, open and 'other specify' responses, interviewer comments and results to pre-defined edit checks (i.e. whether they had passed or failed the check).

An experienced data processing team carried out coding and editing of questionnaires at NatCen's Brentwood offices. Researchers at NatCen were continuously involved in all complex editing decisions.

If the editor could not provide a solution to the check, they would flag the check for further consideration by the research team. These more complex checks required editing and coding using a modified version of the CAPI program. The majority of these checks were consistency checks where responses in different parts of the questionnaire were unlikely to occur (for example, extreme values of amounts) or were not logically possible according to some pre-defined rule.

Researchers attempted to validate the extreme value or inconsistency by examining other characteristics of the case to see whether the keyed response could be valid. For example, if long weekly working hours were identified, an attempt was made to examine whether this was because the claimant was self-employed or in a profession where long working hours were not unusual.

The number of verbatim questions to be coded are shown in Table C.7:

Table C.7 Number of verbatim questions

Open	15
Other specify	17

The code frames used for the verbatim questions in this study were developed by NatCen researchers from a listing of responses to the relevant questions from the first 768 completed interviews.

In the course of each interview, where a respondent gave details of current or recent spells of employment, this information was coded to the Standard Industrial and Standard Occupational Classifications – SIC (2007) and SOC (2000). Industry was classified to a two-digit level and Occupation to a three-digit level.

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Under Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) some lone parents (depending on the age of their youngest child) are no longer eligible to continue receiving Income Support (IS) and will move to other destinations including Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

A survey of over 2,500 lone parents was undertaken between five and ten months prior to the end of their eligibility for IS when their youngest child is seven to determine their work-readiness and likely requirements in terms of future support. Research design and fieldwork were undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion.

The findings describe lone parents':

- past employment;
- characteristics and circumstances including physical and mental health;
- self-perceived barriers to work;
- views on childcare and combining work with parenting.

This survey is one element of a comprehensive programme of evaluation research, using a mixed methods approach, to assess the effects of LPO.

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