

Lone Parents and Work Based Learning for Adults

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Draft report

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Tracy Anderson is Senior Researcher, and Candice Pires is Researcher, both at the National Centre.

Abbreviations and acronyms

BET	Basic Employability Training
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LOT	Longer Occupational Training
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
SEP	Self-Employment Provision
SJFT	Short Job-Focused Training
TEC	Training and Enterprise Council
WBLA	Work-Based Learning for Adults

Summary

Background

Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) is a voluntary training programme which aims to help adults without work, and with poor employability skills, into sustained employment. While WBLA is primarily aimed at JSA claimants, around 15 per cent of participants were claiming other benefits. Of these, the largest group comprised of lone parents in receipt of Income Support, who accounted for almost one half of non-JSA participants. This study focused upon these participants. It provides an insight into their characteristics, experiences of WBLA and views on how helpful they found the programme. In addition to this, the study examined the changes in the skills, qualifications and other characteristics of these lone parent participants, the extent to which they have been in paid work since starting WBLA and the types of work undertaken.

Methodology

The study examined one particular cohort of WBLA participants – those who started their training between 1 January 2002 and 30 April 2002 and who participated in either SJFT, LOT or BET. The sample was drawn from those participants marked as being eligible for New Deal for Lone Parents and claiming Income Support. In total, 474 lone parent participants were interviewed between April and June 2003, giving a response rate of 63 per cent. A face-to-face computer assisted interview was conducted with the respondents. On average, this lasted 54 minutes. The resulting data were weighted to take account of selection and non-response.

Key findings

The vast majority of lone parent participants were women (88 per cent) and had dependent children under the age of 16 (86 per cent). Prior to participating in WBLA, many had no, or low level, skills and qualifications. 42 per cent had either never used a computer or had only done so a few times, 32 per cent had no qualifications and 19 per cent reported having difficulties with reading, writing or numeracy.

There were notable differences between those who participated in the different WBLA opportunities. Those who went on to participate in BET tended to be the most disadvantaged: Compared with SJFT and LOT participants, a greater proportion of BET participants had poor basic skills (49 per cent), poor IT skills (54 per cent) and no qualifications (53 per cent). SJFT and LOT participants were generally more similar to each other, but, even among these groups, there were still sizeable proportions with poor IT skills (31 and 43 per cent respectively) and no qualifications (26 and 28 per cent).

Since starting WBLA, almost one half (48 per cent) of lone parent participants had improved their human capital by either attending a course which had improved their English, reading, writing, numeracy or IT skills, or by gaining a qualification. Those who participated in BET were most likely to have reported such human capital gains, with 59 per cent doing so compared with 37 per cent of SJFT participants and 50 per cent of LOT participants.

Looking at these improvements in more detail, almost one third (32 per cent) of lone parent participants had improved their IT skills via attending courses and three per cent had improved their basic skills. Those who reported basic skill improvements were predominantly BET participants.

In addition to these skill improvements, 27 per cent of the participants had gained a qualification. This was most common among LOT participants (31 per cent compared with 23 per cent of SJFT participants and 13 per cent of BET participants).

Not only did a substantial proportion of lone parents have low level skills when they started on the programme, the majority had no recent work experience. Seventy per cent had not worked in the two years prior to 2002. Since starting WBLA, however, 48 per cent had been in paid employment (predominantly as employees). This was less common among those who participated in BET (of whom only 28 per cent had done so compared with 53 per cent of SJFT participants and 52 per cent of LOT participants).

The type of work undertaken by these lone parents since participation varied. They were most commonly employed in health and social work (26 per cent), and wholesale and retail industries (25 per cent). One third were in administrative or secretarial positions. Many others were employed in personal service occupations (14 per cent), sales or customer services (15 per cent) and elementary/unskilled occupations (20 per cent). They primarily had permanent contracts (84 per cent) and were concentrated in the lower end of the pay scale. Fifty-six per cent reported a net hourly rate of less than £5.00, with only eight per cent earning £7.00 or more after tax and other deductions. Fifty-nine per cent of employed lone parent participants worked part-time, most probably due to their caring responsibilities and more limited availability for work.

While these entries into work (and improvements in human capital) are likely to be connected with participation in WBLA, we do not have the means to assess to what extent these changes are attributable to the programme. However, the views of the participants' themselves provide some support for the role of WBLA. Many thought that the programme had helped them to get paid work, often because it had led to increased self-confidence or a qualification.

Unfortunately, only 65 per cent of lone parent participants could recall starting any training between January and April 2002. As only the views of these lone parents are known, conclusions about the proportion of all participants within this cohort who found their training to be useful cannot be drawn, although the survey data does allow for an estimate of the minimum proportion of participants for whom this was the case. Assuming those who did not recall training could report no positive effects, around one half of all participants in each opportunity type thought that their training was useful. Furthermore, 15 per cent of all SJFT participants, 28 per cent of LOT participants and 13 per cent of BET participants thought that WBLA had helped them to get a job.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) is a voluntary training programme aimed principally at those, aged 25 and over, who have been without work for at least six months and who are currently in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) or another qualifying benefit.¹ There is also provision for other priority groups² to gain immediate access to the programme, although they account for a minority of entrants.

Since April 2001, the delivery of WBLA has been the responsibility of Jobcentre Plus (formerly the Employment Service). Prior to this, responsibility lay with the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). At the time of transfer to Jobcentre Plus, WBLA was subject to a number of changes to make it more employment focused and to tailor provision to the length of time customers had been without work.

The main objective of the programme is to help adults without work, and with poor employability skills, into sustained employment. The programme includes four types of provision (known as 'Opportunities'):

- Short Job-Focused Training (SJFT) offers up to six weeks of training for the most job-ready. Via individually tailored packages of training, SJFT aims to address the needs of those people who lack the specific work-related skills required by local employers by building on previous work experience and/or training. It is open to those who have not been in work for at least six months and can include short courses such as fork lift truck driving.
- Longer Occupational Training (LOT) addresses more fundamental training requirements and can last for up to one year. LOT offers training packages tailored to help individuals overcome whatever barriers to work they face. It can include work trials or placements, basic skills training, occupational training and/or soft skills training and is available to people who have already been claiming JSA for at least twelve months.
- Basic Employability Training (BET) is aimed at those with the most acute needs and is usually expected to last for six months. It is designed to help those who have severe basic skills needs (i.e. those with a reading/numeracy assessment under the level of an average seven year old) with the aim of moving them into work. BET also includes language courses in English.
- Self-Employment Provision (SEP) offers help and guidance to those wishing to set up their own business. It also provides the opportunity for individuals to test their business by trading while still receiving financial help. SEP can last up to 18 weeks.

¹ These are Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Maternity Benefit.

² These include ex-regulars in HM forces, lone parents, returnees to the labour market, people made redundant as part of an designated large-scale redundancy, refugees, homeless people and residents of designated Foyers, people recovering from drug addiction and people referred by their NDPU, NDLP or ONE adviser.

In addition to this assistance, Programme Centres (previously known as Job Clubs) are available to provide job search support to those participants who do not find work by the end of their training.

All participants receive an allowance-based payment equivalent to their weekly benefit plus at least ten pounds while they are on the programme.³

There are two possible routes on to Work Based Learning for Adults. The main route is direct referral by Jobcentre Plus staff or New Deal Personal Advisors (including NDLP personal advisors). A small proportion of participants initially discuss participation with the training provider, although their entry onto WBLA is still subject to Jobcentre Plus approval. Since April 2001, there have been 135,600 starts on WBLA, with 74,000 starting in the operational year 2002/2003. Those starting on WBLA were predominantly in receipt of JSA; only around 15 per cent were claiming other benefits. Of these, the largest group comprised of lone parents in receipt of Income Support who account for almost one half of non-JSA participants. This group predominantly participated in LOT, with only around one fifth undertaking SJFT and under ten per cent BET.

1.2 Aims of the study

This study focused upon the largest group of non-JSA WBLA participants, lone parents claiming Income Support (herein referred to as lone parent participants).⁴ The aim of the study was:

- To provide insight into the characteristics of lone parents claiming Income Support who participated in WBLA
- To examine their experiences of WBLA and their views on how helpful participation had been
- To examine the extent to which these participants had been in paid work since WBLA and the types of work undertaken
- To consider other changes in characteristics which had occurred since participating in WBLA.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Sample

The study examined one particular cohort of WBLA participants – those who started their training between 1 January 2002 and 30 April 2002. The period was chosen to ensure that the cohort contained a sufficient number of participants and to ensure that the vast majority would have completed the programme before they were interviewed. Only those participating in SJFT, LOT or BET were considered. Policy interest in SEP was focused on the effect of the test-trading. Unfortunately, very few lone parent participants have ever reached this stage.

The sample was drawn from those participants marked as being eligible for New Deal for Lone Parents and claiming Income Support. The sample was clustered to improve fieldwork.

³ Lone parents receive a training allowance equivalent to their weekly benefit plus fifteen pounds.

⁴ A separate report examines those participants who were claiming JSA (Anderson et al, 2004).

Full details of the sampling can be found in the accompanying technical report (Taylor and Anderson, 2004) available on request from DWP.

1.3.2 Data collection

The data for this study was collected using CAPI (computer aided personal interviewing). The questionnaire was developed by NatCen and PSI researchers, and officials from the DWP. The development work included a pilot study which provided the opportunity to test the content and length of the questionnaire.

Main stage fieldwork took place between April and June 2003. In total, 474 lone parent participants were interviewed, giving a response rate of 63 per cent. A face-to-face computer assisted interview was conducted with the respondents. On average, this lasted 54 minutes.

Further details about the fieldwork and the questionnaire can be found in the accompanying technical report (Taylor and Anderson, 2004) available on request from DWP.

1.3.3 Analysis

The analysis primarily used survey data which have been weighted to take account of selection and non-response.

Due to the concentration of lone parent participants in LOT, it was not always possible to undertake separate analysis for each opportunity. Descriptive statistics are not presented for those groups with an unweighted base of less than 25. For those with an unweighted base between 25 to 50, the statistics are presented within brackets and should be treated with caution.

1.4 Structure of report

The structure of the report is as follows. Chapter Two focuses on the characteristics of lone parent participants prior to participating in WBLA. Chapter Three considers the activities undertaken while on the WBLA programme and participants' views on their training. Attention is then turned to the types of work undertaken by participants since WBLA in Chapter Four. Chapter Five then examines the changes in participants' skills, qualifications and other characteristics since the beginning of 2002. And finally, Chapter Six summarises the findings and concludes.

Where appropriate, and drawing on the findings of a separate report (Anderson et al, 2004), lone parent participants will be compared with the main WBLA participant group, i.e. those claiming JSA.

2 Characteristics of lone parent participants

2.1 Introduction

Those lone parents who participate in Work Based Learning for Adults are by no means an homogenous group. Their demographic profile, educational levels and work history vary both between and within opportunity types. This chapter examines the characteristics of these lone parents prior to participating in WBLA (i.e. as at the beginning of January 2002). It initially examines the demographic profile of the cohort of participants who started on the programme between January and April 2002, before looking at more work-related characteristics; namely skills, qualifications and work history. Attention is then turned to other personal and social characteristics before examining the factors which participants themselves identified as barriers to finding work prior to 2002. Finally, the characteristics of these lone parent participants are compared with those of the JSA claimants who started WBLA during the same period.

2.2 Demographic characteristics

2.2.1 Gender and age

Unlike WBLA participants who had been claiming JSA, the majority of lone parent participants were female, Table 2.1. They were predominantly aged under 45, with an average age of 36 years. However, there were some differences between opportunities, with a greater proportion of LOT participants aged under 35 (50 per cent compared with 39 per cent of SJFT and LOT participants).

Table 2.1 Gender and age

	Figures in Percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Gender				
- Male	10	12	11	12
- Female	90	88	89	88
Age				
- Under 30	14	21	15	19
- 30-34 years	25	29	24	27
- 35-39 years	29	21	27	24
- 40-44 years	18	18	22	18
- 45-49 years	11	8	7	8
- 50-54 years	3	3	5	4
- 55 or more	0	0	0	0
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.2.2 Marital status and parenthood

As would be expected, the majority of lone parent participants were either single and never married, divorced or separated at the beginning of January 2002, Table 2.2. Only four per cent were partnered at this time. It is assumed that the circumstances of these participants changed soon after this (i.e. before or during their time on WBLA), such that they were recorded as being eligible for New Deal for Lone Parents while on the programme.⁵

Table 2.2 Marital status

	Figures in Percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Marital status				
- Single, never married	41	40	49	41
- Married	6	3	2	4
- Living as a couple	0	1	0	0
- Widowed	4	2	5	3
- Divorced	29	38	31	35
- Separated	20	16	13	17
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>287</i>	<i>65</i>	<i>451</i>
Parenthood				
- Parent to children under 16	83	88	83	86
- No children under 16	17	12	17	14
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

The majority of participants also had children under the age of 16 at the beginning of January 2002, Table 2.2. Nearly one half of this group (46 per cent) had just one child aged under 16, but 17 per cent had three or more. In most cases (80 per cent) their youngest child was of school age (i.e. aged five or over), with 39 per cent of the participants only having children aged ten or over.

Obviously, in order to be classified as a 'lone parent', an individual must have children. Those 'lone parent' participants who did not report having dependent children under the age of 16 may have had children aged 16 or more, or become a parent after the beginning of January (but before/during their time on WBLA).

2.2.3 Ethnicity and country of birth

One quarter of lone parent participants were from non-white ethnic groups, mainly Black-African or Black-Caribbean. As with the main JSA participants, this was more common among BET participants, of whom 46 per cent were non-white compared with 27 per cent of SJFT participants and 19 per cent of LOT participants.

The proportion of participants born outside of the UK also varied widely by WBLA opportunity. Forty-three per cent of BET participants were born outside the UK, compared with less than one in five SJFT and LOT participants. However, many had lived in the UK for 20 years or more, Table 2.3.

⁵ The survey data does not enable us to test this assumption. The majority of these 'partnered' participants were married throughout 2002 but is unknown whether they had experienced any periods of separation during this time.

Table 2.3 Length of time in the UK

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Less than 5 years	0	1	14	3
5 – 9 years	7	4	9	5
10 – 19 years	5	3	7	4
20 – 29 years	2	3	10	4
30 years or more	2	1	2	2
Born in the UK	85	87	57	82
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.2.4 Health problems and disabilities

Disabilities and other health problems can prevent individuals from undertaking paid work and/or make it difficult to look for work. Just under one quarter of lone parent participants (23 per cent) reported having had a health problem or disability which affected the work they could do at the beginning of January 2002. A smaller proportion of SJFT participants reported such a problem (18 per cent compared with 23 per cent of LOT participants and 27 per cent of BET participants). As individuals with such problems are likely to have had greater difficulty finding or maintaining paid work, they may have spent a substantial period out of paid employment. Unfortunately, nothing is known about the nature or degree of these self-reported health problems or disabilities. They may be relatively minor and/or short-term. Indeed, only 20 per cent of those who reported having such a problem were recorded as having ever claimed Incapacity Benefit since May 1999 until starting on WBLA. Furthermore, only 27 per cent were recorded by Jobcentre staff as having a disability. This suggests that the majority of these reported problems were relatively minor.

2.2.5 Region

Lone parent participants, like the main JSA participants, were located across all regions of England, with the largest proportion in London. BET participants were particularly concentrated in this region, Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 Region

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
North East	2	4	0	3
North West	10	22	16	18
Yorkshire and Humberside	14	10	7	11
West Midlands	16	10	0	10
East Midlands	1	10	2	6
East of England	9	11	1	9
South East	8	9	12	9
London	31	21	58	29
South West	8	4	4	5
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.3 Work related characteristics: skills and experience

Those individuals who participate in Work Based Learning for Adults may have been out of work for a variety of reasons including low level skills or a lack of qualifications or recent work experience. This section examines the skills and experience of lone parent participants prior to starting on the programme.

2.3.1 Basic skills

Nineteen per cent of lone parent participants had some basic skills needs at the beginning of January 2002. Overall, five per cent reported having difficulties with English. Given the greater proportion of BET participants born outside of the UK and the focus of BET on basic skills, it is not surprising that difficulties with English were significantly more common among this group, with one quarter reporting such problems compared with one or two per cent of SJFT and LOT participants, Table 2.5. This pattern was also evident (although not as marked) for reading, writing and numeracy, with a smaller proportion of SJFT and LOT participants reporting difficulties compared with those who went on to participate in BET.

Table 2.5 Self-reported language, reading, writing and numeracy problems

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Difficulties with English	1	2	25	5
Difficulties with reading	2	3	18	5
Difficulties with writing/spelling	7	8	23	10
Difficulties with numbers	4	8	11	8
Any of the above	10	16	49	19
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.3.2 IT skills

Turning to IT skills, around one quarter of lone parent participants had never used a computer prior to January 2002 and a further 16 per cent had only used one a few times, Table 2.6. Those who participated in BET tended to have lower IT skills compared with other participants; 54 per cent of BET participants had never used a computer or used one only a few times compared with 31 per cent of SJFT participants and 43 per cent of LOT participants.

Table 2.6 IT skills

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Never used a computer	15	27	35	26
Used a computer a few times	16	16	19	16
Basic computer skills	37	31	34	33
Good computer skills	23	21	11	20
Advanced computer skills	9	6	2	6
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.3.3 Qualifications

Around one third of all lone parent participants had no qualifications. Once again those who went on to participate in BET were most disadvantaged, with just over one half being without qualifications, Table 2.7. Those who did hold qualifications predominantly had qualifications equivalent to NVQ level two or lower.

Table 2.7 Level of highest qualification

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
NVQ level 4 or above	13	10	8	11
NVQ level 3	18	11	10	13
NVQ level 2	29	34	12	30
NVQ level 1	11	13	9	12
Level unknown	3	3	8	4
No qualifications	26	28	53	32
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>458</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

While some of the highly qualified lone parents who participated in BET were from overseas and reported having difficulties with English, it was unclear why others with higher level qualifications entered this opportunity. Unfortunately, the data did not allow this to be examined in greater detail.⁶

2.3.4 Work history

In addition to a lack of skills and qualifications, the absence of recent work experience can make it difficult for individuals to find work. The majority of lone parent participants had not worked in the two years prior to 2002 or had never had a paid job, Table 2.8. This is likely to be primarily due to these women having taken time out of the labour market in order to care for their children.

Table 2.8 When last in paid work prior to January 2002

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Within the 12 months prior	24	25	15	23
Within 13-24 months prior	7	7	8	7
More than 24 months prior	62	56	56	58
Never had a job	8	11	22	12
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>279</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>445</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

Those who had been in paid work within the three years prior to 2002⁷ had been employed across all occupational groups. Thirty-five per cent were employed in elementary (unskilled) occupations, 17 per cent in sales and customer service occupations, 11 per cent as process, plant and machine operatives and a further 11 per cent in personal service occupations. Just over one half (54 per cent) worked full-time, 30 per cent worked 16 to 29 hours per week and 16 per cent worked fewer than 16 hours per week. In 56 per cent of cases, they had been in

⁶ It may be that in some cases the opportunity type had been mis-recorded in the administrative data.

⁷ This was the period for which detailed work history data was collected in the survey.

their last job for over 12 months; in 24 per cent of cases, the job had lasted more than two years.

Indeed, a large proportion of the lone parents described themselves as spending ‘most of their time in steady jobs’ prior to 1999. This was more common among SJFT participants than among those participating in LOT or BET. Unsurprisingly, a similarly large proportion described themselves as spending ‘a lot of time looking after the home and family’, Table 2.9.

Table 2.9 Pre-1999 Work History

Figures in percentages (per cent agreeing with statement)

	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
I spent a lot of time looking after the home and family	40	46	47	45
I spent most of my time in steady jobs	54	41	41	44
I did mainly casual or short-term work	11	13	10	12
I was in work, then out of work, several times over	11	9	14	10
I spent more time unemployed than in work	8	9	7	9
I was never unemployed	6	8	4	7
I spent most of my time self-employed	1	2	2	2
I spent a lot of time out of work due to sickness/injury	0	1	1	1
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.4 Attitudes to work

Attitudes to work can also be important in finding employment. However, they are difficult to capture, in addition to being impossible to gauge retrospectively. Participants were asked to what degree they agreed with a number of statements relating to work and success⁸:

‘Hard work is satisfying’

‘You can do anything if you work hard’

‘You should be the best at what you do’

‘Making money is mostly due to luck’

‘To do well at work you have to be lucky’

‘To make a lot of money you have to know the right people’

These questions are believed to capture more constant attitudes to work and success, that is, attitudes that are unlikely to change in the short-term. As such they are used to provide an indication of participants’ attitudes prior to WBLA (although they equally provide an indication of their attitudes at the time of interview).

The first three statements relate to motivation and, as Table 2.10 shows, the majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with each of them.

⁸ The statements were not presented to respondents in this order.

Table 2.10 Attitudes to work and success: motivation

Figures in percentages (per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing)

	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Hard work is satisfying	82	86	81	84
You can do anything if you work hard	78	83	81	82
You should be the best at what you do	76	73	69	73
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>100-1</i>	<i>287-8</i>	<i>67-8</i>	<i>454-7</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

The latter three statements relate to the degree to which individuals believed that success was out of their control and due primarily to luck. A much smaller proportion agreed or strongly agreed with these statements. Furthermore, differences were evident between those who participated in the different opportunities. BET participants were much more likely to agree or strongly agree with these statements than participants in SJFT or LOT (particularly with the first two), Table 2.11.

Table 2.11 Attitudes to work and success: luck

Figures in percentages (per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing)

	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Making money is mostly due to luck	13	17	32	18
To do well at work you need to be lucky	12	14	28	15
To make a lot of money you have to know the right people	28	27	35	29
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>100-1</i>	<i>287-8</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>454-6</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

This difference may be due to real differences in opinions between BET participants and others, perhaps reflecting their own previous lack of labour market success. Alternatively, given the number of BET participants who were born outside of the UK, it is possible that this reflects cultural differences. Unfortunately, the small number of BET respondents prevent this being examined more closely.

2.5 Other social indicators

The previous sections have looked at the demographic and work-related characteristics of WBLA participants. Attention is now turned to other characteristics which can help to provide some insight into the circumstances of lone parent participants and their labour market prospects.

2.5.1 Accommodation

Not having a fixed address or living in an institution can make finding work difficult. Fortunately, almost no lone parent participants lived in residential institutions or other more temporary forms of accommodation. Most commonly they rented accommodation from either the council or a housing association, Table 2.12.

Table 2.12 Accommodation

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Respondent responsible for accommodation				
- Owning/buying	13	8	8	9
- Rented – social landlord	67	68	74	69
- Rented – private landlord	13	19	12	17
Living rent-free/others responsible for rent	1	1	3	2
Residential institution, hostel, B&B, no fixed address	0	0	1	0
Other	5	4	2	4
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.5.2 Access to telephones, transport and financial services

In addition to accommodation type, access to basic goods and services (such as a telephone, a car and a bank account) can be viewed as indicators of social advantage. A lack of access to such basic goods and services not only suggests disadvantage but can also make finding and keeping a job more difficult.

Not having access to a telephone may make it difficult to contact employers about jobs (in addition to making it difficult for employers to contact job applicants). Ninety-four per cent of lone parent participants had access to a telephone to make and receive calls; however, there were differences between opportunities. BET participants were less likely to have had such access (88 per cent compared with 96 per cent of SJFT participants and 94 per cent of those participating in LOT).

A lack of personal transport may limit the geographical area in which individuals can look for work. Most participants did not have a driving licence (54 per cent). This was the case for over three quarters of BET participants (77 per cent), compared to around one half of SJFT and LOT participants (55 and 48 per cent respectively). Furthermore, not all of those with a driving licence had access to a vehicle. Only 15 per cent of BET participants had both a driving licence and access to a vehicle, as did 36 per cent of SJFT and 38 per cent of LOT participants.

Access to a bank account can also be important if employers will only pay wages directly into a bank. Over three quarters of participants (79 per cent) had a bank account at the beginning of 2002. SJFT participants were most likely to benefit from such services, with 85 per cent having a bank account compared with 77 per cent of those participating in LOT and 75 per cent of those participating in BET.

A lack of access to basic banking services can also make it more difficult to manage personal finances. Those without bank accounts cannot make use of cheaper payment methods, such as direct debits, and are likely to find it more difficult to secure credit. The majority of participants believed that they were 'just about getting by' financially in January 2002, Table 2.13. Thirty-seven per cent of participants felt that they were getting into difficulty. Few felt that they were able to save or spend money on leisure.

Table 2.13 Whether managing financially at beginning of January 2002

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Able to save or spend money on leisure	5	4	4	4
Just about getting by	60	60	56	60
Getting into difficulty	36	36	40	37
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>99</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>457</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.5.3 Childhood experiences: parental interest in education, employment and financial situation

So far the characteristics examined have related to the position of participants just prior to participating in WBLA. Attitudes to education and work can also be influenced by childhood experiences.

An individual's attitudes towards education may reflect the amount of encouragement they received as a child from the adults around them. Just under two thirds of participants said that their parent/guardian(s) took a lot or a fair amount of interest in how they were getting on in school, Table 2.14. For less than half of the participants, their parent/guardian(s) gave them a lot or a fair amount of encouragement to go on with their studies beyond earliest school leaving age.

Table 2.14 Parental interest in education

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Interest in how getting on at school				
- A lot	40	41	35	40
- A fair amount	20	23	25	23
- A little	18	17	14	17
- None	20	13	19	15
Encouragement to continue with education				
- A lot	29	31	35	31
- A fair amount	16	14	11	14
- A little	18	19	10	18
- None	34	31	37	33
Lived in care institution	2	5	7	5
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>287</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>455</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

Parental employment can have an impact on individuals' attitudes to work and this differed slightly between opportunity types. One quarter of participants had experienced a period when they were aged 11 to 16 when there was no working parent/guardian in the home. This was less common among SJFT participants, Table 2.15. There were also differences in maternal employment when the participants were aged 11 to 16. While the majority of participants (60 per cent) had experience of maternal employment during this period, this was less likely among BET participants. Thirty-four per cent of this group lived with mothers who were never in a paid job (compared with 27 per cent of SJFT participants and 25 per cent of LOT participants). This may be at least partially explained by the high proportion of BET participants born outside of the UK. In many cultures, it is not usual for women with children to be in paid employment.

In spite of there being a working adult in the homes of most participants when they were aged 11 to 16, a large proportion of participants in each opportunity type stated that the financial situation during that period was very or quite difficult, Table 2.15.

Table 2.15 Parental employment and childhood financial situation

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Parental employment when aged 11-16				
- Always at least one working parent	81	68	67	71
- Period when no working parent	17	27	25	25
Lived in a care institution	2	5	7	5
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>286</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>453</i>
Financial situation when aged 11-16				
- Very difficult	22	22	24	22
- Quite difficult	21	30	17	26
- Neither easy nor difficult	26	21	17	21
- Quite easy	22	13	21	16
- Very easy	9	8	14	9
- Unsure	0	2	0	2
Lived in a care institution	2	5	7	5
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>456</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.6 Self-identified barriers to unemployment

Even if, for example, an individual has low or no qualifications, they may not view this as a disadvantage in finding work if the type of work they are seeking does not require any qualifications. Table 2.16 shows the factors respondents identified as either stopping them or making it difficult for them to look for/start work in November/December 2001 (prior to starting WBLA).

While nine per cent of participants were in paid work or other activities in November/December 2001, 78 per cent identified one or more factors which prevented them from looking for/starting work at that time. Unsurprisingly, the most common factor identified by lone parents was their caring responsibilities – citing either a lack of childcare or their wish not to leave their children. A lack of previous work experience was also a commonly identified type of barrier, identified by 13 per cent of participants. Other factors identified included the individual's own illness or disability, financial issues and a lack of transport. Given that few lone parent participants lived in temporary accommodation and only seven per cent had ever been convicted of a crime prior to January 2002, it was expected that few would cite these factors as barriers to employment.

The substantial proportion of lone parent participants that reported facing no barriers prior to participating in WBLA may be surprising, however it must be remembered that respondents were being asked to think back to this period. It is therefore possible that the barriers reported were subject to recall error. Those who reported having no barriers may have been unable to clearly remember their situation at that point in time. As such, the figures in Table 2.16 should be viewed with caution and treated as a guide to the types and incidence of barriers faced prior to WBLA rather than providing a definitive picture.

Table 2.16 Barriers to employment in November/December 2001

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Caring related issues	41	50	49	48
- Lack of childcare	27	28	31	28
- Do not want to leave children	19	22	19	21
- Illness of other family member	3	8	10	7
Lack of skills/experience	14	18	23	18
- Lack of previous work experience	9	14	16	13
- Lack of references from previous employers	5	6	8	6
- Poor literacy	1	1	6	2
- Poor English	0	0	2	0
- Lack of qualifications/education	1	4	3	3
Own illness/disability	10	12	8	11
No jobs available locally	12	9	6	9
Lack of transport	11	6	2	6
Other personal problems	7	13	10	11
- Debt or financial reasons	5	12	7	10
- No permanent place to live	1	0	1	0
- Problems with the police/criminal record	1	0	0	0
- Problems with drugs or alcohol	1	1	0	1
- Family or relationship problems	0	1	1	1
Discrimination	2	3	2	3
Other	9	9	7	8
Any barriers	71	82	75	78
No barriers	16	10	18	13
Working or doing something else at this time	13	8	7	9
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>287</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>456</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

2.7 Comparison with JSA participants

Lone parent participants (who were claiming IS) were qualitatively different to those JSA claimants who participated in WBLA. Unsurprisingly, they were significantly more likely to be female, have dependent children aged under 16 and have been without a partner at the beginning of January 2002, Table 2.17. The lone parents were slightly younger on average and less likely to be aged 50 or more. Those who went on to participate in SJFT and LOT were also less likely to have a disability or health problem which affected the work they could do.

Lone parent participants also differed from JSA participants in terms of skills and qualifications. Across all opportunities, they were less likely to have basic skills needs. Those who participated in BET were also less likely to have below basic IT skills or to have no qualifications. Lone parent and JSA participants undertaking SJFT and LOT were relatively similar in these respects.

However, while the lone parents tended to have at least similar skills and qualifications to JSA claimants (if not better), they did not compare favourably in terms of work experience and were significantly more likely never to have been in paid work or not to have worked in the previous two years.

Table 2.17 Comparison of lone parent participants and JSA participants

Figures in percentages

	SJFT		LOT		BET	
	LP	JSA	LP	JSA	LP	JSA
Demographics						
- Female	90	20	88	24	89	20
- Aged under 30	14	17	21	17	15	21
- Aged 50 or over	3	21	3	20	5	14
- Not partnered	94	60	96	57	98	53
- Dependent children aged under 16	83	32	88	33	83	40
- Non-white ethnic group	27	17	19	15	46	51
- Health problem or disability	18	29	23	41	27	35
Skills/experience						
- Basic skills needs	10	18	16	21	49	75
- Below basic computer skills	31	40	43	40	54	77
- No qualifications	26	27	28	25	53	68
- Not worked in two years prior	70	29	67	40	78	53
Barriers to employment						
- Care-related issues	41	3	50	5	49	5
- Lack of skills/experience	14	19	18	23	23	41
- Own illness/disability	10	13	12	19	8	18
- Lack of transport	11	15	6	16	2	13
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>99-101</i>	<i>852-</i>	<i>287-</i>	<i>937-</i>	<i>65- 69</i>	<i>829-</i>
		<i>861</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>957</i>		<i>848</i>

Note: Where the figures are in bold, the difference is significant at five per cent level.

The barriers to employment faced by lone parent and JSA participants also differed. Lone parent participants were more likely to cite childcare related issues as a barrier and less likely to cite a lack of skills/experience, illness/disability or a lack of transport (although not always significantly so).

2.8 Summary

Lone parent participants were predominantly women with dependent children under the age of 16. They were more diverse in other respects, such as in terms of age, ethnicity, qualifications and skills (in addition to a range of other characteristics). Furthermore, there were notable differences between those who participated in different opportunities.

Unsurprisingly, those lone parents who went on to participate in BET tended to be the most disadvantaged. Compared with SJFT and LOT participants, a greater proportion had poor basic skills, poor IT skills and no qualifications. They also fared poorly in terms of access to basic goods and services. SJFT and LOT participants were generally more similar to each other but even among these groups, there were still sizeable proportions with poor IT skills or no qualifications.

One common characteristic was the lack of recent paid employment. The majority of lone parent participants within each opportunity type had not worked in the two years prior to 2002. However, while many cited this lack of work experience as a barrier to employment prior to participating in WBLA, unsurprisingly the most commonly identified barriers were a lack of childcare or not wanting to leave the children.

3 Participation in WBLA

3.1 Introduction

Work Based Learning for Adults offers participants a tailor-made package which can include formal training, employer work placements and/or assistance with job search. It is, therefore, of interest to know what the cohort in question actually did while participating in this programme and whether they thought the training was useful or not. Unfortunately, our capacity to do this is limited by the ability of participants to remember their participation. After examining the extent of participant recall, this chapter considers what type of assistance participants received and their views about whether (and how) WBLA helped them.

3.2 Identification of participation in WBLA

While administrative data indicates that all respondents had participated in WBLA, many did not remember participating in any government training schemes, let alone WBLA specifically. Over one third of all participants did not recall having started to participate in any government training between January and April 2002, Table 3.1. Furthermore, a number of those who did recall participating in training did not identify WBLA as the programme under which they had received training. (In spite of this, it is reasonable to assume that the training they identified was in fact that which they received under WBLA, particularly as the branding of WBLA is relatively low-key compared with New Deal programmes.)

Table 3.1 Identification of training starting January-April 2002

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Identified participating in WBLA	25	20	27	22
Identified participating in other government training	30	49	34	43
No training identified	45	31	40	35
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

There are a number of reasons why a 'participant' may not recall their participation in a training programme. They may not have perceived what they were doing as anything more than claiming their benefit and looking for work, particularly if the training was focused on job search. They may have intended going on the training and then never started the course or only participated for a day or two. Alternatively, they may have forgotten that they did any training, particularly if the duration of their training was short. Indeed, as Table 3.2 shows, those individuals who participated for shorter periods of time (according to administrative data) were less likely to identify participation.

Table 3.2 Identification of training by duration

	Figures in percentages		
	Six weeks or less	7-13 weeks	More than 13 weeks
Identified participation	52	69	79
No training identified	48	31	21
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>165</i>	<i>134</i>	<i>133</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

The majority of this chapter focuses upon those participants who did recall participating in training starting between January and April 2002. It therefore must be remembered that much of the following analysis only provides a partial picture.

3.3 Entry onto WBLA

Prior to participating, the vast majority (73 per cent) of self-identified participants discussed the programme with Jobcentre staff. Thirty-six per cent discussed participation with a Personal Adviser and 14 per cent talked to a training provider. The majority of lone parent participants, who identified participating in WBLA, very much wanted to get involved, Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 How much wanted to get involved

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Very much	(66)	80	-	73
Quite a lot	(24)	7	-	14
Not much	(10)	12	-	11
Not at all	(0)	2	-	2
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>102</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in WBLA.

Individuals may be granted early entry onto WBLA for a number of reasons (see Chapter One). Sixteen per cent of those participants who recalled participating in WBLA said that they were able to join the programme early. The reasons given for their early entry included, unsurprisingly, being on New Deal for Lone Parent or being a woman returner.⁹

3.4 Duration and activities undertaken

Within WBLA, the training offered under each opportunity is expected to be of different durations. For the majority of participants, their training lasted between five and 26 weeks, Table 3.4. BET and LOT participants generally undertook training for between seven and 26 weeks. SJFT participants' training tended to be shorter, generally lasting between five and 13 weeks. This is more or less in line with the expected durations of each opportunity, as outlined in Chapter One, but it should be noted that training can last longer than anticipated. Shorter training periods are also evident, possibly due to participants leaving the programme prior to completion.

⁹ Due to the small number of lone parent participants who identified entering WBLA early, it was not possible to look at their reasons for doing so in any more detail.

Table 3.4 Duration of training

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
One week or less	2	0	(2)	1
Two week or less (>1)	2	2	(0)	1
Four week or less (>2)	9	6	(5)	6
Six week or less (>4)	47	6	(7)	13
13 week or less (>6)	22	42	(17)	35
26 week or less (>13)	7	35	(65)	34
39 week or less (>26)	4	5	(4)	5
More than 39 weeks	8	6	(0)	5
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>294</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002.

The content of the training also differed between opportunity types. In most cases, the training participants undertook was what they most wanted to do, although a proportion claimed they did not really want to do it, Table 3.5. This was significantly more likely among non-white participants (18 per cent compared with six per cent of white participants).

Table 3.5 Whether training was what participant wanted to do

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
What most wanted to do – first choice	79	77	(71)	76
What wanted to do but not first choice	14	15	(17)	15
Something did not really want to do	7	8	(12)	8
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>295</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002.

By far the most common activity undertaken while on WBLA was a training course at either an employer's premises, a college or training provider's premises, Table 3.6. In 63 per cent of cases, these resulted in the participant gaining a qualification or credits towards a qualification. Working at an employer's premises was less common. Just over one third of all self-identified participants did so, although this was more common among LOT participants.

Table 3.6 Activities undertaken

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
A training course	90	90	(92)	91
Work at an employers	11	43	(28)	35
Job search	14	11	(10)	11
Basic skills training	0	1	(5)	1
IT training	4	5	(6)	5
Home-study	6	9	(2)	8
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>196</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>288</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002.

Obviously, as only the activities undertaken by self-identified participants are known, the incidence of activities must be viewed with caution. Those who did not recall participation may have undertaken less distinct and memorable activities; they may have been more likely to have undertaken job search activities, and/or less likely to have participated in a training course or to have gained a qualification.

3.5 Leaving the training early

Of all lone parent participants who recalled starting training, 23 per cent left the programme before the end, Table 3.7. This was the case for only nine per cent of SJFT participants. This may be because SJFT primarily offers shorter courses and, therefore, people were more likely to complete the training even if they were not particularly enjoying it or were having difficulties attending.

Table 3.7 Whether left training early

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Left training early	9	25	(29)	23
Completed training	91	75	(71)	77
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>295</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002.

In most cases (84 per cent), it was the participants themselves who decided to leave. In 15 per cent of cases, the training provider was involved in the decision and in three per cent of cases the employer was involved. Participants most often left due to personal reasons (26 per cent), because they had found a job (17 per cent) or because they were dissatisfied with the training (19 per cent).

3.6 Usefulness of training

The majority of self-identified participants had found the training very or quite useful, Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Usefulness of training

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Very useful	63	57	(46)	57
Quite useful	21	22	(34)	24
Not very useful	10	10	(4)	9
Not at all useful	5	11	(17)	10
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>296</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002.

Unsurprisingly, those who stayed on the programme until the end of their training were more likely to have viewed it as useful, Table 3.9. Participants were also more likely to have found the programme useful if they had gained a qualification.

Table 3.9 Usefulness of training by whether completed training and whether gained a qualification

	Figures in percentages			
	Completed training	Left training early	Gained qualification	Did not gain qualification
Very useful	61	41	66	42
Quite useful	23	28	24	25
Not very useful	9	10	7	12
Not at all useful	7	22	3	21
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>228</i>	<i>67</i>	<i>162</i>	<i>107</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002 who thought the training was useful.

The ways in which the lone parent participants found the training useful varied, Table 3.10. Around one third of all participants said that it helped to increase their self-confidence. Other popular ways were that it helped them with their job search, or because they had gained a qualification or new skills.

Table 3.10 Ways in which the training was useful

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Increased self-confidence	37	30	(33)	32
Helped with job search	28	15	(34)	20
Gained a qualification	12	20	(8)	17
Gained new skills	19	16	(16)	16
Improved IT skills	8	17	(2)	14
Met/got to know people	4	9	(7)	8
Updated existing skills	9	3	(7)	4
Improved English, reading, writing	0	0	(19)	2
Gave me something to do/got me out of a rut	2	2	(3)	2
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>171</i>	<i>33</i>	<i>254</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002 who thought the training was useful.

As the 'usefulness' of training may relate to aspects unconnected with employment, self-identified participants were also asked specifically about whether their training had helped them to get a job. Thirty-five per cent had been employed since WBLA and said that their training had helped them to get a job, Table 3.11. (This accounts for 65 per cent of those self-identified participants who had been in paid work since participation). Those lone parents who completed their training were more likely to say that it had helped them to get a job than those who left before the end (39 per cent compared with 22 per cent).

Table 3.11 Whether training helped participants get a job

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Training helped to get a job	26	40	(22)	35
Training did not help to get a job	31	17	(12)	19
Did not have a job	43	43	(67)	46
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>198</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>296</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002.

The most common way in which training had helped participants to get a job was by increasing their self-confidence, Table 3.12. They were also helped by the training in other ways including gaining a qualification required by an employer, their work placement becoming a paid job and by gaining work experience.

Table 3.12 Ways in which the training helped the participant to get a job

	Figures in percentages
	ALL
Increased self-confidence	66
Gained qualification required by employer	38
Employer placement became a job	30
Gained work experience, employer references	24
Helped you to attend job interviews	23
Helped to persuade employers to interview you	16
Improved English, reading, writing	9
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>103</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002 who thought the training had helped them to get a job.

Unfortunately, the small unweighted bases limit the extent to which views about training could be examined among sub-groups of participants. There were some slight differences between the views of self-identified participants by their characteristics, Table 3.13. However, it is crucial to remember that this only describes the views of those who recalled participating in training. Consequently, these differences can only give a possible indication of how training was viewed by different groups.

Table 3.13 Usefulness of training and whether training helped participant to get a job by participant characteristics

	Figures in percentages (<i>Unweighted n</i>)			
	ALL			
	Per cent useful		Per cent helped to get job	
White	81	<i>(226)</i>	39	<i>(226)</i>
Non-white	77	<i>(63)</i>	21	<i>(63)</i>
Disability, health problem	72	<i>(71)</i>	22	<i>(71)</i>
No disability, health problem	83	<i>(225)</i>	39	<i>(225)</i>
No qualifications	75	<i>(81)</i>	31	<i>(81)</i>
One or more qualifications	83	<i>(215)</i>	37	<i>(215)</i>
In paid work within year prior	83	<i>(59)</i>	35	<i>(59)</i>
Not in paid work in the year prior	80	<i>(227)</i>	35	<i>(227)</i>
ALL	81	<i>(286)</i>	35	<i>(286)</i>

Base: All those who identified participating in training starting January-April 2002.

Note: Where the figures are in bold, the difference is significant at five per cent level.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to make any judgements about the views of those participants who did not recall their training. It may be that one of the reasons that this group did not remember participating was because they felt that they got little out of it, therefore making it less memorable. Alternatively the training may have helped them to get a job quickly, and therefore, they spent less time on the programme, thus making it more difficult to recall. Table 3.14 shows the proportion of all participants who reported participating in a training programme that they found useful or that helped them to get a job. This can be viewed as the 'worst case', that is, the position if none of those who were unable to recall participating felt that the training had been useful or that they had been helped to get a job.

Table 3.14 Usefulness of training and whether it helped participants to get a job

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Useful or very useful	47	55	48	52
Not useful	9	14	12	13
Did not identify training	45	31	40	35
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>458</i>
Identified training and helped to get a job	15	28	13	23
Identified training but did not help	41	41	47	42
Did not identify training	45	31	40	35
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>288</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>458</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

3.7 Comparison with JSA participants

Due to the large proportion of lone parent and JSA participants who were unable to remember participating in WBLA, no valid comparisons can be made between the views of these two groups.

3.8 Summary

Unfortunately, individuals who participate in training sometimes do not recall doing so. This was the case for a large number of lone parent WBLA participants. Consequently, the survey data can only provide a partial view of what they did on WBLA and their views on the training received. Those who were able to identify their participation predominantly undertook formal training courses, with many gaining qualifications as a result. The majority found the training to be useful, particularly if they had completed the training and/or gained a qualification. A smaller proportion thought that their training had helped them to get a job, often because it had led to increased self-confidence or a qualification.

Due to the substantial proportion of participants who did not recall their spell of training, conclusions regarding the views of all participants should not be drawn. However, the data do allow the 'worst case' to be established – that is, the situation if none of those lone parents who did not recall training had found their participation useful. Consequently, it can be said that at least around one half of all participants in each opportunity type thought that their WBLA training was useful and at least 15 per cent of SJFT participants, 28 per cent of LOT participants and 13 per cent of BET participants thought that it helped them to get a job.

4 Paid work undertaken after WBLA

4.1 Introduction

Lone parent participants have entered many different types of employment since Work Based Learning for Adults, some preferable to others in terms of hours, pay or contract type. This chapter examines the types of work undertaken. It considers the occupation and industry of their most recent jobs and the methods by which the participants found their jobs. Contract type, hours worked, pay and other compensations are then examined before looking at the childcare needs of employed participants. Finally, qualification requirements of their work and the training received, if any, are discussed.

4.2 Whether worked since WBLA

Since participating in WBLA, 48 per cent of lone parents had entered paid work.¹⁰ This was significantly less common among BET participants compared with SJFT and LOT participants (28 per cent compared to 53 and 52 per cent respectively). Unsurprisingly the proportion who had been employed since their training differed between various sub-groups of participants, Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Proportion employed since starting WBLA by participant characteristics

Figures in percentages (*Unweighted base*)

	ALL	
White	53	(346)
Non-white	34	(106)
Disability, health problem	32	(106)
No disability, health problem	53	(353)
No qualifications	43	(142)
One or more qualifications	51	(316)
In paid work within year prior to WBLA	56	(102)
Not in paid work in the year prior to WBLA	47	(343)
ALL	48	(459)

Note: Where the figures are in bold, the difference is significant at 5 per cent level.

Not all of those who had entered paid employment were still employed at the time of interview; only 40 per cent of all lone parent participants were employed when interviewed (45 per cent of SJFT participants, 43 per cent of LOT participants and 23 per cent of BET participants). The reasons given for no longer being employed included the job being temporary or for a fixed contract, being made redundant and personal reasons.¹¹

The vast majority of those who had been in paid work since WBLA were employees in their most recent job. The remainder of this chapter examines the types of work undertaken by

¹⁰ This was a similar proportion to that reported for participants in New Deal for Lone Parents nine months after participation (Lessof et al, 2003).

¹¹ Unfortunately due to the small number of respondents who had left their job, this cannot be examined in further detail.

these participants. Unfortunately, there were too few respondents who were self-employed to examine in detail, Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Employment status: most recent post-WBLA employment

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Employee	47	50	28	46
Self-employed	6	2	0	2
No employment since WBLA	47	49	72	52
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

4.3 Occupation and employer characteristics

One third of the lone parent participants who went on to work were employed in administrative or secretarial occupations, Table 4.3. Given the female-domination of this occupational group and the profile of lone parents, this is not surprising. Many others were employed in personal service occupations, sales and customer service or elementary (unskilled) occupations. Some of these occupations offer more scope for part-time and more flexible working arrangements which can be helpful to those with childcare responsibilities. Few of the employed participants had any managerial or supervisory responsibilities.

Table 4.3 Occupation and managerial/supervisory duties

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Occupation				
- Managers and senior officials	6	4	-	4
- Professional	0	1	-	0
- Associated professional and technical	4	5	-	6
- Administrative and secretarial	23	39	-	33
- Skilled trades	2	2	-	2
- Personal services	12	14	-	14
- Sales and customer services	26	13	-	15
- Process, plant and machine operatives	6	5	-	5
- Elementary	21	18	-	20
Number of staff managed/supervised				
- None	91	94	-	92
- One to four	5	5	-	5
- Five or more	4	2	-	3
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>221</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

Participants had found employment within all industrial groups but were concentrated within health and social work, and wholesale and retail, Table 4.4. Public administration was also a relatively popular industry of employment.

Table 4.4 Industry

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	2	1	-	1
Manufacturing	4	7	-	6
Electricity, gas and water supply	0	1	-	0
Construction	5	2	-	3
Wholesale and retail	35	24	-	25
Hotels and restaurants	4	6	-	7
Transport, storage and communications	6	4	-	4
Financial intermediation	2	1	-	1
Real estate and business activities	6	5	-	6
Public administration	10	9	-	10
Education	11	5	-	6
Health and social work	11	30	-	26
Other community, social, personal services	4	5	-	4
Private households	0	1	-	0
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>149</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>219</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.
Note: This is based on Standard Industrial Classification SIC92.

The majority worked for employers with multiple sites and at establishments with fewer than 100 staff, Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Number of sites and number of employees

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Number of sites				
- single	19	36	-	33
- multiple	79	62	-	64
- unsure	2	2	-	2
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>221</i>
Number of employees				
- 1 to 9	23	22	-	24
- 10 to 24	14	20	-	19
- 25 to 99	27	29	-	26
- 100 to 499	31	15	-	20
- 500 or more	6	15	-	12
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>220</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

4.4 Applying for the job

Those lone parents who had worked since starting WBLA had heard about their most recent jobs in a variety of ways, Table 4.6. Over one quarter had learned about the vacancy for their job through an advert, while one in five had been asked directly by the employer to apply for the job. This may have been the result of contact made with employers through WBLA or, alternatively, may have arisen from other prior contact. Where the participants were asked to apply, in many cases the job was not open to other applicants.

Table 4.6 How heard about the job

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Advert	27	29	-	28
Asked to apply for job by employer	20	19	-	20
Jobcentre	20	18	-	19
Through direct contact with the employer	18	11	-	12
Through friends, relatives or neighbours	6	10	-	11
Private recruitment agency	6	6	-	6
Other	3	7	-	5
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>221</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

On occasions, other people persuaded the employer to interview or recruit the participants. Around one quarter of employed lone parent participants claimed that someone had had an influential role on their recruitment. This influence was predominantly that of another employee, Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Whether anyone persuaded the employer to interview/recruit

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Someone persuaded	24	25	-	26
- Someone else at work/another employee	4	7	-	7
- Placement employer	2	4	-	4
- Personal Adviser	0	4	-	3
- New Deal staff member	2	3	-	4
- Someone at Jobcentre	0	2	-	1
- Someone at employment agency	4	2	-	2
- Training provider	4	4	-	4
- Husband, wife or partner	0	1	-	1
- Relative or friend	6	3	-	4
- Someone else	2	1	-	2
No-one	76	75	-	75
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>220</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

Two out of five participants also got help from other people with the application process, Table 4.8. Such help was received from a wide range of sources, both formal and informal, but many got help from their training provider or friends and relatives. The help received included assistance with interview preparation, help with application forms and CVs, and getting information about the job.

Unfortunately, the majority of those who did get help did not feel that it had had a particularly positive effect on their employment chances, Table 4.9. Fifty-seven per cent thought it was very or fairly likely that they would have got the same job without any assistance.

Table 4.8 Whether received help with applying for job

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Received help	44	36	-	40
- Someone else at work/another employee	2	5	-	4
- Placement employer	2	3	-	3
- Personal adviser	4	6	-	6
- New Deal staff member	8	5	-	6
- Someone at Jobcentre	6	3	-	4
- Someone at employment agency	0	2	-	2
- Training provider	11	10	-	10
- Husband, wife or partner	0	2	-	1
- Relative or friend	10	6	-	7
- Someone else	4	2	-	3
Did not receive help	56	64	-	61
<i>Unweighted Base*</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>221</i>
Type of help received				
- Preparing for the interview	-	48	-	46
- Completing application form	-	43	-	42
- Writing out/updating CV	-	43	-	39
- Getting information about the job	-	37	-	31
- Help with getting to the interview	-	14	-	11
<i>Unweighted Base**</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>54</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>87</i>

Base: *All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

**All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation and who received help with getting their most recent job.

Table 4.9 Likelihood of getting same job without help

	Figures in percentages
	ALL
Very likely	22
Fairly likely	35
Not very likely	26
Not at all likely	8
Definitely would not have got the job	10
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>85</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation and who received help with getting their most recent job.

In addition to being the source of information and job search assistance, other people can also play a role in the decision to accept a job. However, four out of five of the employed participants claimed that no-one had persuaded them to accept their most recent job, Table 4.10. Where there was some persuasion, it was predominantly friends or relatives who had influenced the decision.

Table 4.10 Whether persuaded to accept job

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Someone persuaded to accept	19	18	-	20
- Someone else at work/another employee	0	1	-	1
- Placement employer	2	0	-	1
- Personal adviser	2	4	-	4
- New Deal staff member	2	4	-	3
- Someone at Jobcentre	2	1	-	1
- Someone at employment agency	2	1	-	1
- Training provider	6	2	-	3
- Husband, wife or partner	2	2	-	2
- Relative or friend	2	6	-	6
- Someone else	2	1	-	1
No-one persuaded	81	82	-	80
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>221</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation .

With or without external persuasion, individuals may still feel under pressure to accept a job offer if, for example, they are in a precarious financial situation or expect soon to be. This was not the case for the majority of employed lone parent participants. Eighty-eight per cent claimed that they had not felt under pressure to accept their most recent job.

4.5 Hours, contract type, pay and other compensation

Most employed participants (84 per cent) had permanent contracts with only ten per cent being employed on a temporary basis and six per cent on a fixed term contract. The majority who had worked since WBLA were also contracted to work under 30 hours per week (i.e. part-time), Table 4.11. Given that lone parents are likely to have caring responsibilities which affect their availability for work, this is not surprising. Indeed, when asked about their job search activity in November/December 2001, 39 per cent of lone parent participants said they would have only accepted part-time work. (A further 36 per cent said that they would have accepted either part-time or full-time work.)

Working overtime, paid or unpaid, was very uncommon among those participants who had worked. This may, once again, be related to their caring responsibilities. Only three per cent usually worked any paid overtime and only two per cent any unpaid overtime. Consequently the hours actually worked by the lone parents were rarely different from their contract hours.

Table 4.11 Hours worked

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Usual weekly contract hours				
- 15 hours or less	10	10	-	12
- 16-29 hours	42	50	-	47
- 30-40 hours	44	37	-	38
- More than 40 hours	4	3	-	3
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>216</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

The employed participants were concentrated around the lower end of the pay scale, although few were paid less than the minimum wage of £4.20 (less than three per cent).¹² The majority (56 per cent) reported net hourly pay of less than £5.00 per hour, with only eight per cent earning £7.00 an hour or more, Table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Net hourly pay

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Up to £4.00	(10)	15	-	14
£4.00 to £4.49	(30)	20	-	22
£4.50 to £4.99	(17)	22	-	20
£5.00 to £5.49	(14)	18	-	16
£5.50 to £5.99	(12)	10	-	11
£6.00 to £6.49	(9)	4	-	6
£6.50 to £6.99	(2)	2	-	3
£7.00 to £7.99	(3)	8	-	6
£8.00 to £8.99	(0)	1	-	1
£9.00 or more	(5)	0	-	1
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>136</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>201</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

In addition to pay, employers can compensate their employees in other ways. Some employers offer assistance with expenses incurred due to work such as travel and childcare. Only twelve per cent of employed lone parent participants benefited from such an arrangement. The help received was generally with the costs of tools, equipment, travel, childcare and training.

Some employers also help their employees to provide for their retirement by offering a pension scheme. The majority of employed lone parents did not have the option of an employer-provided occupational pension scheme in their most recent job, Table 4.13. However, even where a pension scheme was provided, the majority did not participate in it. This may be for a number of reasons. The individuals may have chosen not to do so; alternatively, the employer's pension scheme may not have been open to them because they had not worked with the employer long enough to be eligible or because they were not at a grade within the organisation at which this benefit was offered.

Table 4.13 Occupational pensions

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Pension scheme and participates	20	25	-	23
Pension scheme but does not participate	28	24	-	26
No pension scheme	52	50	-	52
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>50</i>	<i>147</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>213</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

While examining pay levels and other compensation gives some indication of the rewards received for working, it provides little insight into how undertaking paid work affected the lone parent's financial position. This can depend upon the number of hours worked and the

¹² The survey data does not allow a gross hourly wage rate to be calculated for all employed participants. However, proportion paid less than the minimum wage can be estimated.

withdrawal of benefits, among other things. In their most recent job, the majority of employed participants thought that they were better off than when they had been claiming benefits, although over one in five believed that they were worse off, Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 Relative financial position

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Better off	63	57	-	58
Worse off	21	23	-	22
About the same	16	21	-	20
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>220</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

4.6 Childcare arrangements

One of the possible reasons why employed lone parents may find themselves worse off when working is the cost of childcare. Furthermore, as main provider and carer for their children, lone parents are more likely to find their responsibilities limiting the amount of time they can devote to paid work and, therefore, their total earned income. Just over one half of lone parent participants who had worked since WBLA had children that needed to be cared for whilst they worked (53 per cent). The children of the other lone parents may have been old enough to care for themselves or each other, or at school whilst the parent was working.

The childcare arrangements used by those who required such help were varied. One quarter used a crèche or a nursery that was not connected to their workplace, Table 4.15. Using a childminder or leaving children with friends or relatives were also common. In the majority of cases (85 per cent), their childcare arrangements did not vary from week to week.

Table 4.15 Type of childcare used

	Figures in percentages
	ALL
Partner/wife/husband (including ex-partners)	10
Grandparents	19
Other relatives	18
Friends	17
Childminder	22
Workplace/college crèche or nursery	4
Any other crèche/nursery	25
Someone else	9
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>87</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who needed to use childcare while working.

Lone parents were often not charged for childcare by partners, relatives and/or friends. Overall, 28 per cent of those who used childcare did not pay for it, Table 4.16. Of those who were charged for their childcare, 69 per cent received financial assistance with this expense, although this often did not cover the full cost.

Table 4.16 Actual weekly cost of childcare

	Figures in percentages
	ALL
Nothing	28
£1 to £25	23
£26 to £50	18
£51 to £75	12
£76 to £100	7
Over £100	13
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	86

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who needed to use childcare while working.

4.7 Learning to do the job and training

For certain types of work, employers require their employees to have particular qualifications or certificates. In some cases, such employers will only recruit individuals who are already qualified; in other cases, the employer may be willing to recruit unqualified individuals with the expectation that they will gain the qualification once they have started (although the training may not be provided by the employer themselves).

Most employed lone parent participants (66 per cent) had entered jobs that did not require any qualifications. The majority of those who entered a job requiring a qualification already had the necessary certificates prior to starting the job. Only nine per cent of employed participants had entered a job which required a qualification they did not already hold.

Even when qualifications are not required, many jobs necessitate a new recruit to be trained in order to do the work. Such training can consist of informal on-the-job training, such as someone showing the new recruit how to do the work, or more formal training, such as attending a training course at a college. The majority of employed participants said that they had not received either type of training, Table 4.17. Of those who had, many had someone show them how to do the work for them to copy and/or had someone watch them work. Attending more formal training courses at their employer's premises was also common.

Table 4.17 Training received

	Figures on percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Any training	41	45	-	45
- Someone showed you for you to copy	31	35	-	36
- Someone helped/watched you work	39	38	-	38
- Did part of the job just for practice	14	15	-	16
- Training course at college or training centre	12	16	-	15
- Training course at the employers premises	31	30	-	32
No training	59	55	-	55
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	51	151	19	221

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

Sometimes the training courses undertaken lead to a qualification (or credits toward a qualification). This was the case for one third of those participants who undertook a training course in order to do their job.

The vast majority of employed lone parent participants stated that it had only taken up to one month to learn how to do the job, with a large proportion claiming that it took less than one week, Table 4.18. The most common reason given for it taking less than three months was that the job was relatively straightforward. This was cited by 48 per cent of employed participants. Other common reasons included having a natural aptitude for the job (cited by 43 per cent) and having done the same type of work before (41 per cent).

Table 4.18 How long it took to learn the job

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Less than 1 week	41	31	-	32
Up to 1 month	22	25	-	25
1 to 3 months	29	30	-	30
4 to 6 months	2	9	-	7
7 to 12 months	4	3	-	4
Over 12 months	2	2	-	2
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>51</i>	<i>148</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>218</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who have worked since participation.

4.8 Comparison with JSA participants

Compared with those participants who were JSA claimants, there were no significant differences in the proportion of lone parent participants who had worked since leaving WBLA. However, there were differences in the types of work undertaken, Table 4.19.

Table 4.19 Comparison of lone parent participants and JSA participants

	Figures in percentages					
	SJFT		LOT		BET	
	LP	JSA	LP	JSA	LP	JSA
Occupation						
- Administrative and secretarial	23	13	39	13	-	2
- Skilled trades	2	11	2	16	-	15
- Personal services	12	4	14	9	-	4
- Sales and customer services	26	7	13	10	-	6
- Process, plant and machine operatives	6	25	5	18	-	16
- Elementary (unskilled)	21	26	18	22	-	54
Industry						
- Manufacturing	4	20	7	16	-	21
- Wholesale and retail	35	18	24	21	-	20
- Transport, storage and communications	6	11	4	11	-	5
- Public administration	10	5	9	6	-	4
- Health and social work	11	7	30	10	-	5
Job characteristics						
- Part-time	52	19	60	23	-	44
- Permanent	87	73	84	72	-	64
Financial position						
- Better off	63	75	57	71	-	62
- Worse off	21	14	23	15	-	20
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>50-</i>	<i>454-</i>	<i>149-</i>	<i>480-</i>	<i>18-</i>	<i>262-</i>
	<i>51</i>	<i>462</i>	<i>151</i>	<i>489</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>266</i>

Note: Where the figures are in bold, the difference is significant at 5 per cent level.

The occupational and industrial profiles of the jobs undertaken by lone parent and JSA claimant participants differed greatly. Lone parent participants tended to be in office-based or sales jobs and were less likely to have undertaken manual jobs. They were more likely to have worked within wholesale and retail, and health and social work compared with the JSA participants who more often worked in manufacturing. Employed lone parents were also more likely to work part-time hours and be in permanent work. Their relative financial position when in work was also less favourable, although not always significantly so.

Many of these differences are likely to be due to the different gender profiles of these two groups and the traditional split of occupations into those that are male- and female-dominated. Furthermore, the need for lone parents to take childcare requirements into consideration is likely to be a key reason why they were more likely to have undertaken part-time work than those (predominantly male) participants who claimed JSA.

4.9 Summary

Since participating in WBLA, 48 per cent of lone parents had been in paid employment (predominantly as employees), although this was less common among those who participated in BET (28 per cent).

Of those who were employees, around one in five had been asked directly by their employer to apply for their job. In most cases they had either seen an advert for the job or heard about it through the Jobcentre. Lone parent participants were most commonly employed in health and social work, and wholesale and retail. Over one third were in administrative or secretarial positions. Other relatively popular occupations were sales and customer services, and elementary (unskilled) jobs. In most cases, participants had learned to do their jobs quickly (in less than one month) and received no training. This was primarily because the job was relatively straightforward, they had a natural aptitude for the job or they had done a similar job before.

Employed lone parent participants were concentrated in the lower end of the pay scale. Furthermore, few participated in occupational pension schemes or received financial assistance with expenses from their employer. They primarily had permanent contracts and worked part-time. This is likely to be related to their caring responsibilities and their more limited availability for work.

5 Changes in participant characteristics

5.1 Introduction

While moving participants into employment is the ultimate goal of WBLA, it is not the only possible positive outcome of training. Participating in WBLA may have a positive effect on lone parents in terms of their level of skills and qualifications, which can in turn improve their employability. By comparing the characteristics of lone parent participants at the beginning of January 2002 and the time of interview, this chapter examines the changes in human capital that have occurred since participating in WBLA – namely improvements in basic and IT skills via participation in courses and the acquisition of qualifications. It also considers the changes that have occurred in other participant characteristics.

5.2 Skills and qualifications

5.2.1 *Self-reported improvements in basic skills*

Since January 2002, three per cent of all lone parent WBLA participants had been on a course which they felt had improved their basic skills. Whereas SJFT and LOT participants rarely reported having difficulties with English, reading, writing or numeracy, these problems were much more common among BET participants. Therefore, it was unsurprising that BET participants were more likely to have been on a course which they felt had improved these skills than SJFT and LOT participants, Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Whether improved level of basic skills via attending a course

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
English improved	0	0	8	1
Reading improved	0	0	5	1
Writing improved	0	0	4	1
Numeracy improved	0	0	8	2
Any basic skill improvement	0	1	21	3
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>99-101</i>	<i>280-9</i>	<i>60-9</i>	<i>439-459</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

Of course, in addition to attending courses/training to improve these skills, individuals may receive more informal help from other sources. It is therefore possible that a larger proportion of lone parent participants have improved their basic skills during this period.

5.2.2 *Self-reported improvements in IT skills*

Attendance at an IT training course was a more popular activity amongst lone parent participants. One half had undertaken a course to improve their IT skills since January 2002, Table 5.2. Among those who did participate in a course, the majority reported an increase in their level of IT skills after the course.

Table 5.2 IT courses attended

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Attended a course	45	56	49	51
- IT skills improved	22	34	38	32
- IT skills did not improved	23	20	10	19
Did not attend a course	55	46	51	49
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>101</i>	<i>286</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>455</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

Of all those who did report an improvement, a large proportion had never used a computer before the beginning of January 2002, Table 5.3. After the IT training, the vast majority felt that they had developed at least basic computer skills with 15 per cent rating their skills as advanced.

Table 5.3 IT skills January 2002 and at interview

	Figures in percentages	
	IT skills January 2002	IT skills at interview
Never used a computer	45	0
Used a computer a few times	20	3
Basic computer skills	28	35
Good computer skills	7	47
Advanced computer skills	0	15
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>148</i>	<i>148</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 whose IT skills improved.

Once again, this may underestimate the proportion of lone parent participants who have improved their skills during this period as improvements may also be achieved through more informal routes such as via self-study or practice. However, it should be noted that at the time of interview 11 per cent of lone parent participants had still never used a computer and a further ten per cent had only used one a few times.

5.2.3 Qualifications gained

In addition to improved IT skills, just over one quarter of lone parent WBLA participants had gained a qualification since January 2002, Table 5.4. Twenty-five per cent had gained a vocational qualification in this period while three per cent gained an academic qualification. Those from non-white ethnic groups were significantly less likely to have gained any qualification, with only 18 per cent doing so compared with 30 per cent of those from white ethnic groups. There were no differences between those with or without previous qualifications, or those who had or had not worked in the 12 months prior to 2002.

Table 5.4 Whether gained any qualification

	Figures in percentages			
	SJFT	LOT	BET	ALL
Gained a vocational qualification	20	30	12	25
Gained an academic qualification	4	2	2	3
Gained any qualification	23	31	13	27
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>99-101</i>	<i>289</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>456-458</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

Of those who did gain a qualification, 31 per cent had no qualifications at the beginning of January 2002, that is before the training, Table 5.5. Most of the qualifications gained were equivalent to NVQ level 2 or below, or were of an unknown level. As a consequence of these qualification gains, the proportion of lone parent participants without any qualifications fell from 32 per cent at the beginning of January 2002 to 23 per cent at the time of interview.

Table 5.5 Highest qualification at January 2002 and at interview

	Figures in percentages	
	January 2002	At interview
NVQ level 4 or above	8	10
NVQ level 3	10	14
NVQ level 2	31	37
NVQ level 1	14	23
Qualification level unknown	5	15
No qualifications	31	0
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>123</i>	<i>123</i>

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002 who gained a qualification.

5.2.4 Overall acquisition of human capital

Of course it may be that while some, more able, lone parents work towards gaining a qualification, those who have basic skills needs concentrate upon improving these skills. Consequently, some participants may be improving their human capital in one way while others are developing theirs in another. Overall 48 per cent of lone parent participants had improved their human capital in at least one of the ways considered above since January 2002. This was most common among BET participants of whom 59 per cent had either improved their skills or gained a qualification, compared with 50 per cent of LOT participants and 37 per cent of SJFT participants.

These improvements may or may not be attributable to participation in WBLA. Without a control group of non-participants, this cannot be investigated. Furthermore, care must be taken when trying to interpret these changes in skills and qualifications in relation to employability. Improvements in basic skills, if they are improved to the level required by an employer, may directly lead to increased chances of employment. More indirectly they may lead to increased self confidence which can also improve employability. However, a small improvement may be insufficient to have either effect. Similarly improvements in IT skills may have direct or indirect effects, particularly in increasingly computerised workplaces. Qualifications gains must also be viewed with care. Not all qualifications improve employment chances. This depends upon the needs of employers and whether the qualifications gained are those which employers require (or even recognise). Unfortunately the desirability of the qualifications gained (or the levels of skills attained) from the employers' perspective is unknown.

5.2.5 Comparison with JSA participants

Compared with those JSA claimants who participated in WBLA, a greater proportion of lone parent participants within each opportunity reported having improved their human capital since January 2002 in one of the ways considered above, Table 5.6. These differences were only significant for LOT and BET participants. Among the former, lone parent participants were more likely to have improved their IT skills or gained a qualification than JSA participants. Lone parents participating in BET were less likely to have improved their basic skills but more likely to have improved their IT skills.

Table 5.6 Comparison of lone parent participants and JSA participants

	Figures in percentages					
	SJFT		LOT		BET	
	LP	JSA	LP	JSA	LP	JSA
Improved basic skills via course	0	2	1	2	21	34
Improved IT skills via course	22	17	34	21	38	16
Gained a qualification	23	19	31	23	13	10
Any of the above	37	31	50	38	59	46
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>98-101</i>	<i>861</i>	<i>286-289</i>	<i>957</i>	<i>68-69</i>	<i>848</i>

Note: Where the figures are in bold, the difference is significant at five per cent level.

As already mentioned, these outcomes cannot necessarily be attributed to participation in WBLA. A number of other factors can affect whether someone attends a course, improves their skills and/or gains a qualification. Consequently, the differences between lone parent and JSA participants should not be interpreted as evidence of WBLA having differential effects on these two groups.

5.3 Other characteristics which may affect employability

As outlined in Chapter Two, access to certain basic goods and services can influence employment chances and job search, as can other factors such as health and financial problems. Of course, while the circumstances of the participants may improve, they can also worsen. Table 5.7 shows the proportion of lone parent participants who have experienced changes in their circumstances since January 2002.

Table 5.7 Changes in characteristics which may impact upon employment chances

	Figures in percentages	
	Positive change	Negative change
Access to a telephone	5	2
Driving license	3	0
Access to vehicle	5	2
Bank account	9	2
Financial situation	12	21
Health problems	3	6
<i>Unweighted Base</i>	<i>457 - 459</i>	

Base: All lone parent participants (claiming IS) starting January-April 2002.

With most of these factors, the proportion of lone parent participants who experienced positive changes was larger than the proportion who experienced negative changes. However, at the time of interview, there was still an often substantial proportion of lone parent participants who were disadvantaged in these respects. Three per cent did not have access to a telephone, and 14 per cent did not have a bank account. Sixty-one per cent had no driving licence or, if they did, had no access to a vehicle. And nearly one quarter of all lone parents (23 per cent) had a self-reported health problem which affected the work they could do.

5.4 Summary

Since January 2002, 48 per cent of lone parent participants had improved their human capital by either attending a course which had improved their English, reading, writing, numeracy or IT skills, or by gaining a qualification. Those who participated in BET were most likely to

have reported such gains, with a substantial proportion reporting improvements in their basic skills, improvements in their IT skills or qualifications gains. A large proportion of SJFT and LOT participants also improved their IT skills and/or gained a qualification. In addition to these changes in skills and qualifications, some lone parent participants experienced changes in other characteristics which may affect their employment prospects – some positive and some negative.

However, without knowing what these (or similar) lone parents would have achieved had they not participated in WBLA, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the degree to which these improvements are attributable to the programme.

6 Conclusions

The main aim of the WBLA programme is to help adults without work, and with poor employability skills, into sustained employment.

Those lone parents who started to participate in WBLA between January and April 2002 had typically not been in work for at least two years. In addition to this lack of recent work experience, 42 per cent had either never used a computer or had only done so a few times, 32 per cent had no qualifications and 19 per cent reported having difficulties with reading, writing or numeracy.

While any of these factors can make it difficult to find work, lone parents had the additional difficulty of being primary carer for their children. The majority had children under the age of 10, and often more than one. Unsurprisingly, a lack of childcare or not wishing to leave their children were the most commonly identified barriers to employment among lone parent participants.

Not all lone parent participants in this cohort were able to recall their WBLA training, with 35 per cent being unable to remember starting any training between January and April 2002. This limited the ability of the study to examine what participants actually did while on WBLA, although it can be stated with certainty that over half of all lone parent participants undertook a training course at a college, employer's or training provider's premises. It can also be concluded that not all lone parent participants completed their training. Their reasons for leaving included personal reasons, dissatisfaction with the training and having found a job.

With regard to participants' views about their training, only the views of those lone parents who remembered their participation are known. While this prevents an accurate conclusion about the proportion of all lone parent participants within this cohort who found their training to be useful, it does allow for an estimate of the minimum proportion for whom this is the case. Consequently, it can be claimed that at least 52 per cent of lone parent participants thought that their training was useful and at least 23 per cent thought that it had helped them to get a job.

Overall, 48 per cent of the lone parent participants had entered paid work since WBLA, although only 40 per cent were in work at the time of interview. One in five had been asked directly by their employer to apply for their most recent job; this may have arisen from contact made during their WBLA participation. They mainly worked part-time and were concentrated in the lower end of the pay scale, with over one half earning a net hourly wage of less than five pounds. Lone parent participants were predominantly found in certain occupational groups: administrative and secretarial, elementary (unskilled), sales and customer services, and personal services. They were also mainly employed within health and social work, wholesale and retail, and public administration.

The characteristics of this cohort of lone parent participants had also changed since their participation in WBLA. Since January 2002, 27 per cent had gained a qualification. In addition to this, 32 per cent reported having improved their IT skills and three per cent reported having improved their basic skills via attending courses.

While these entries into work and improvements in human capital are likely to be connected with the participation of these lone parents in WBLA, we do not have the means to assess whether this would have happened had the sample members not had access to the programme.

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