

Equality Analysis for introducing flexibility to mandatory Income Support (IS) Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) and introducing mandatory Work-Related Activity (WRA) for lone parents

Date: June 2013

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Introduction

The policy changes under consideration are concerned with making changes to regulations:

- so that the frequency and timing of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) for lone parents with a youngest child aged 1 and over, who claim Income support solely on the basis of being a lone parent, can be flexible. These WFIs are currently conducted at fixed points within a claim for IS
- to introduce powers for employment support advisers to require lone parents and nominated carers (under Universal Credit) with a youngest child aged 3 or 4 to undertake mandatory work-related activity

Please note: When we refer to 'lone parents' in this document, we mean:

- Under legacy benefits we are referring to lone parents claiming:
 - Income Support (IS) *solely* on the basis of being a lone parent
 - Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) who are in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG)
- Under new world benefits, we are referring to both lone parents and to nominated household carers, who are claiming either
 - Universal Credit
 - Employment and Support Allowance (Contributory)

Policy background

Lone parents with pre-school aged children can claim Income Support (IS) solely on the basis of being a lone parent and are not required to seek work until their youngest child reaches age 5. Until then, they have to attend regular WFIs once their youngest child is aged one. IS lone parents with a youngest child age 1-3 are required to attend 6 monthly mandatory WFIs. These interviews become quarterly when the youngest child is age 4. The timing of these interviews is specified in Regulations. As part of these meetings, lone parents have to agree an Action Plan with their adviser, but are not required to undertake those activities as a condition of continued receipt of benefit.

Lone parents with pre-school aged children can also be in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). For those who are in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG), they are required to attend Work Focused Interviews, whose frequency is determined by adviser discretion. They, too, must agree an Action Plan with their adviser, but are not required to undertake those activities as a condition of continued benefit receipt.

When their youngest child is aged 5, most lone parents who are claiming IS *solely* on the basis of lone parenthood are required to claim JSA and seek work (or ESA if their capability for work is limited by a health condition). A lone parent's entitlement to claim IS can continue after their youngest child is age 5 if they claim IS for reasons other than being a lone parent. Examples include circumstances whereby a lone

parent is claiming IS on the basis of being a full-time carer, caring for a child who is entitled to the middle or higher rate care component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or where they are an approved Foster Carer and a foster child is placed with them.

For lone parents claiming ESA (WRAG), when their youngest child turns 5 they become subject to the full work related requirements that other ESA (WRAG) claimants face. This means they can be required to undertake work preparation activity.

The policy changes and who will be affected

Flexible WFIs

The proposed changes intend to offer greater flexibility to employment support advisers in how they use Work Focused Interviews to help the claimant move closer to the labour market. Instead of being required to meet lone parents no more and no less than the frequency designated by the regulations, these changes offer greater flexibility in terms of the frequency and timing of WFIs for lone parents claiming Income Support solely on the basis of being a lone parent, whose youngest child is aged 1 and above.

Below is the proposed framework for flexible IS WFIs.

- For lone parents' with a youngest child under 1, there is no change to the existing policy. Lone parents with a youngest child under 1 are not required to attend WFIs.
- For lone parents' youngest child age 1-3 – flexible WFIs. The **frequency and timing** of these interviews will be entirely flexible based on adviser discretion and informed by the needs of the individual claimant. In line with the current policy for IS, we would expect each lone parent to receive a minimum of 2 face to face flexible interviews per year with an adviser, thus ensuring that lone parents will receive at minimum the same level of service they currently receive, but offering the potential for much more tailored support.
- For lone parents with a child age 4 – flexible WFIs. The **frequency and timing** of these interviews will be entirely flexible based on adviser discretion and informed by the needs of the individual claimant. In line with current policy for IS claimants we would expect each lone parent to receive a minimum of 4 face to face flexible interviews with an adviser per year, thus ensuring that lone parents will receive at minimum the same level of service they currently receive, but offering the potential for much more tailored support.

Whilst the proposed minimum number of interviews is the same as the current mandatory WFI requirement, the removal of the existing specific WFI requirements provides scope for advisers to use their discretion to decide the frequency and duration of mandatory WFIs for each individual lone parent.

The minimum and maximum duration of any such interview with indicative benchmarks will be set out in the guidance.

In deciding how the WFI time is used in all cases the adviser will focus on supporting the lone parent in undertaking agreed steps which may help them overcome any barriers they may have for an eventual return to work. The expectation is that the requirement for any individual to attend a flexible mandatory WFI will be reasonable.

Mandatory work-related activity – the policy change would enable us to:

- require lone parents that claim IS solely on the basis of being a lone parent and those that claim ESA and are in the ESA (Work Related Activity Group, WRAG) to undertake work-related activity if their youngest child is aged 3 or 4.

- require lone parents and nominated household carers claiming Universal Credit or ESA (C) in the WRAG to undertake work-related activity if their youngest child is aged 3 or 4.

- WRA would be flexible, tailored to the individual, and must be reasonable taking into account the parent's circumstances. Suitable work-related activity could include preparing a CV, exploring the local labour market or attending skills courses where these are available locally.

- Skills is a devolved issue. As a result, this means that at present, advisers will not be able to mandate claimants to Scottish or Welsh funded skills training. They will be able to mandate claimants to DWP funded provision where this is locally available and they can use existing funding.

The policy change focuses on supporting lone parents in their return to work in the year before they face the full work related conditionality specified by the benefit they are claiming. As a result, we expect that the majority of the lone parents who are mandated to work-related activity are likely to have a youngest child aged 4. However, if advisers identify a lone parent with a child aged 3 who has a significant barrier to work, which will require a longer-term course or activity, they will have the ability to mandate these lone parents to the given activity. This enables advisers to tailor the support they offer to the individual and their specific circumstances.

Why we are making these changes

WFIs and work-related activity support the Government's aim of delivering a welfare system that recognises work as the primary route out of poverty and reduce the number of children in workless households. A child of a lone parent who works part-time is almost three times less likely, and a child of a lone parent that works full-time is 5 times less likely, to be living in poverty than a child of a lone parent who is not working.

The changes to WFI regulations build on and amend the existing regime for lone parents. They align the WFI regime for lone parents who are claiming IS solely on the basis of being a lone parent with the flexible WFI regime already in place for ESA (WRAG) lone parent claimants. It also aligns the IS lone parent regime with the flexible intervention approach which is already a feature of the Jobcentre Plus Offer and the Work Programme. Evaluation evidence on the current WFI regime supports

the provision of support that is personalised, flexible and provided consistently through the same adviser.

The WFI changes also recognise that local managers and advisers are best placed to identify the support and guidance that is appropriate to each claimant. The changes will enable advisers to deliver the individually tailored support, in terms of the timing and frequency of their WFIs, to lone parents to help them prepare for work. This approach fits well with current policy movement in benefits both now and under Universal Credit.

The work related activity changes reflect the Government's recognition of the importance of supporting lone parents to prepare for a return to work and in particular the importance of providing that support during the time that they are entitled to claim Income Support. The policy changes are intended to help smooth the transition from Income Support to full work-search conditionality that lone parent claimants face when their youngest child turns 5.

The work related activity changes intend to offer lone parents support which helps them identify and address any barriers they have to returning to work. In most cases we envisage that this support will be most appropriate in the crucial year before they are due to face the full work requirements of the benefit they are claiming i.e, when their youngest child is aged 4. However, if advisers identify any significant barriers to employment, which will require a longer term solution, then there may be reasons to consider mandating lone parents whose youngest child is aged 3 to work-related activity.

Both changes can be viewed together as the Government increasing the support available to lone parents as they prepare to return to work. Lone parents will be called in for WFIs at points in their claim that advisers see necessary, rather than at set intervals. In these more flexible, tailored interviews, advisers will be able to require lone parents to attend this activity, to better prepare them for a return to work.

What the changes mean for lone parents

Our expectation is that once children are in full-time education, it is reasonable to expect lone parents to take up work. But, before this, lone parents should be offered support to help them prepare for an eventual move into work.

A tailored approach to each lone parent is key and lone parents will receive personalised support based on their individual needs. There are often issues around low levels of confidence and job-readiness amongst lone parents, with claimants who have been on benefits for some time particularly likely to cite their own lack of confidence as a problem.

Lone parents that demonstrate a clear work preparation plan may need the minimum level of support and mandatory work-related activity; and this will also be reflected in the frequency and duration of WFIs. Lone parents who are preparing less well or need higher levels of support may benefit from frequent interviews or lengthier interviews or both, with the addition of being required to undertake work-related activity.

All interventions should be diagnostic. In addition to diagnosing an individual's needs and determining suitable support, Advisers have the discretion to decide how their time can best be spent with claimants to support them in addressing their needs and achieving identified work preparation goals.

Consultation and involvement

A lone parent listening event was held on 19 June 2013 with external stakeholders, lone parents, other Government Departments, Jobcentre Plus Advisers and DWP officials to discuss what works for lone parents, to better understand the barriers that they face and to share best practices. Whilst we did not discuss this proposal at the event, the outcomes of the event will be presented to Ministers and some of the proposals will be explored/considered and fed into our policies including the Jobcentre Plus Offer and the Work Programme. We plan to utilise the long-standing stakeholder group, the Lone Parent Voluntary Group (LPVG) to discuss and develop our approach for this proposal in the coming months.

Opportunity to promote equality

We believe that the policy changes allow us a number of opportunities to promote equality for lone parents currently on Income Support. The changes aim to help further reduce child poverty through enabling more lone parents, who can do so, to take steps to prepare for an eventual move into paid employment.

The evidence and analysis set out below shows that the population affected by the changes is predominantly female. By offering employment support to lone parents of younger children we aim to promote more equality of opportunity between men and women in accessing labour market opportunities and helping with a move back into the labour market.

Providing support that is tailored to the needs of the individual and helping them prepare for and eventually find suitable work, means that they are not excluded from the labour market, and are able to enjoy the wider advantages that come from working that are experienced by the rest of the working population. This could also help them and their families to move out of poverty.

The changes enable specified employment support advisers to mandate lone parents to various different types of work-related activity. The type of activity which is required will depend on the needs of the individual lone parent, as well as what is locally available. This means that there is potential for variation in different parts of the country. However, if advisers determine that a lone parent would benefit from a certain activity and it is not available, then they will have access to the Flexible Support Fund to pay for such activity and any other reasonable costs involved in the lone parent attending the activity (including travel costs). This means that we expect that lone parents will be able to receive the individual support that they need, whilst considering what is locally available.

There is potential for advisers to mandate lone parents to skills training. Skills is a devolved issue and as a result, advisers will not be able to mandate claimants to skills training funded in full or in part by the Scottish or Welsh Governments.

However, lone parents in Scotland or Wales will still have access to DWP funded provision, including DWP funded skills training. As a result, lone parents across Great Britain will have access to a range of back-to-work support.

We recognise the importance of childcare for lone parents undertaking more flexible WFIs and work-related activity. Childcare is a devolved issue and, as a result, lone parents in various parts of Great Britain will have different childcare offers. However, Jobcentre Plus Districts have the discretion to use the Flexible Support Fund in order to pay childcare costs to lone parents attending WFIs and work-related activity, where this is needed, where they do not already make use of the Government's free childcare offer or this does not cover the childcare they need.

In addition, given the importance of good quality early years provision on future outcomes for children, it is important that, where necessary, any barriers to the use of formal childcare by parents are challenged and the positive benefits of formal childcare are promoted to these groups, whilst recognising the important role informal childcare plays for many lone parents.

Finally, on childcare, Jobcentre Plus has a role in signposting parents to more specialist services, where necessary. They make parents aware of local provision of services of which they might not previously been aware. This can be particularly useful for parents with disabled children or lone parents from some ethnic groups.

Evidence and analysis

The following sections look specifically at the possible impact of the policy changes in terms of the protected groups (gender, disability, age, race, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership and religion and belief).

Given the aim of the changes to prepare and support lone parents for an eventual move into work, the focus of the analysis is on the employment circumstances of the different groups. This is intended to highlight any current differences within/between groups that the policy changes are intended to help address.

An assessment of the available evidence and any possible impact on protected groups has been made in the decision-making process for the policy changes.

Gender

The changes will apply to all lone parents, both male and female, when their youngest child turns one year old. Given that 97 per cent of lone parents on Income Support are female¹, this change will clearly impact on more women than men.

The employment rate for lone fathers is significantly higher than for lone mothers, including for those with a youngest child aged between 1 and 4 (although lone fathers will generally be caring for fewer, older children than lone mothers).

¹ Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (November 2012). This statistic should not be published until DWP have released it officially.

The latest available figures show that around 2 in 5 lone mothers with a youngest child aged between one and four were in employment compared to over half of lone fathers². The employment rate for lone mothers is also much lower than that for partnered mothers, and both are well below the overall employment rate for the working-age population, at 73 per cent (Household Labour Force Survey, Q4 2012).

Disability

We do not have a breakdown on the basis of the age of the youngest child. Latest figures for all lone parents suggest that the employment rate amongst disabled lone parents is much lower (39 per cent) than the disabled working age population as a whole (47 per cent) and for disabled partnered mothers (55 per cent)³.

Age

Generally lone parents with younger children are likely to be younger themselves. The table below gives age breakdowns for lone parents on Income Support based on the age of their youngest child

Lone parent IS claimants: age of claimant by age of youngest child⁴

Age of yc Age of LP	1 - 3	4	5 and over
Under 25	38%	20%	3%
25 – 34	46%	51%	28%
35 – 44	15%	25%	44%
45 and over	0%	4%	25%

Source: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, Nov 2012.

The employment rate of younger lone parents is lower than older lone parents, but younger lone parents are also much less likely to be in work than coupled parents (including partnered mothers) within the same age group. Just half of lone parents aged 25 – 34 work (51 per cent), compared to nearly two-thirds of partnered mothers (65 per cent)⁵.

Race

We do not have a breakdown on the basis of the age of the youngest child, but we know that there are some variations in the employment rates for lone parents based on ethnic origin.

² The estimates for lone fathers have a wide margin of uncertainty due to small sample sizes

³ Household Labour Force Survey, Q4 2012. The definition of disability includes the following groups: Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and Work Limiting condition, plus DDA only. The population considered are those aged 16-64, which is referred to here as the working-age population, but is not exactly the same.

⁴ These statistics should not be published until DWP have released them officially.

⁵ Household Labour Force Survey, Q4 2012

Fifteen per cent of lone parents on Income Support are from an ethnic minority, compared to 11 per cent of the working age population⁶.

Sexual orientation

The policy proposals will apply to all lone parents regardless of their sexual orientation. The Department does not hold information on its administrative systems on the sexual orientation of claimants. We do not envisage an adverse impact on these grounds.

Gender re-assignment

The Department does not hold information on its administrative systems on transgender persons. We have no specific evidence on how the policy may impact on lone parents who have undergone gender re-assignment, but do not consider that there will be an adverse impact on these grounds. The Department has endeavoured to ensure that customers will be treated in the same way, regardless of whether they have undergone gender re-assignment.

Pregnancy and maternity

The policy proposals only apply to lone parents with children aged one and over. If a lone parent becomes pregnant, she is entitled to claim IS within 11 weeks of their expected due date. Similarly, a lone parent may be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay or Maternity Allowance from the 11th week before her baby is due (or earlier if the baby is born earlier than the 11th week). Once their child is born they are not expected to attend a WFI, until their child reaches age one.

Marriage and civil partnership

The policy change only applies to lone parents, not those who are married or in a civil partnership.

Religion or belief

We do not have a breakdown on religion or belief on the basis of the age of the youngest child. Based on our knowledge of the policy design and of the claimant group, we do not envisage an adverse impact on these grounds. The Department wants to provide a service appropriate to the needs of claimants with different religions/beliefs, to enable them to access the Department's services. Jobcentre Plus already has in place within their working practices, various general measures which are sensitive to the needs of people from different religions.

⁶ The figure for lone parents on Income Support is taken from DWP administrative data, whereas the figure for the working age population is taken from the Household Labour Force Survey, Q4, 2012. There may be slight differences in these two data sources on the classification of being from an ethnic minority.

Decision making

We do not consider that there will be an adverse impact on any person with a protected characteristic from the policy changes. Any requirements placed on lone parents as a result of the changes would need to be reasonable in terms of their individual circumstances and characteristics.

Where lone parents are expected to attend meetings more frequently or asked to participate in work-related activity, arrangements will be in place to cover any additional needs they may have for childcare or to cover transport costs (including those for any dependent children, where necessary), for example.

The policy changes are intended to increase lone parents' opportunities to access the labour market. We believe that the changes are important in helping lone parents prepare for a future move into work and they will benefit from receiving flexible, tailored support, whilst still on Income Support.

Monitoring and evaluation

DWP is committed to monitoring the impacts of its policies and we will use evidence from a number of sources on the experiences and outcomes of the protected groups.

a) We will use administrative datasets, including the Department for Work and Pensions's Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS), to monitor trends in the benefit caseloads for the protected groups and in the level and distribution of benefit entitlements. The administrative data will provide robust material for age and gender although not, as a rule, for the other protected groups. Where it is practical we will endeavour to incorporate information for the other protected groups.

b) We will use survey data, such as the Family Resources Survey (FRS) and Labour Force Survey (LFS), to assess trends in the employment outcomes of the protected groups. Both the FRS and LFS will collect information on age, disability, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and civil partnerships.

c) We will use qualitative research and feedback from stakeholder groups to assess whether there are unintended consequences for the protected groups, and whether the policy is likely to result in adverse consequences for particular groups.

d) We will utilise feedback from Departmental employee networks and internal management information. For example we will monitor the level of complaints in order to assess the broader impact of the policy.

e) We will draw on broader DWP research where appropriate, as well as consider the need for any research to be commissioned specifically to evaluate the measure.

DWP is looking across its activities to identify and address further gaps in data provision, for protected groups, wherever reasonable.

Sign off

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