

Research report

Helping more parents move into work: an evaluation of the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and In Work Credit: Phase 1 report

by Rita Griffiths

Department for Work and Pensions

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Helping more parents into work: an evaluation of the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and In Work Credit; phase 1 report

Rita Griffiths

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The Author

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Abbreviations

ADF	Adviser Discretionary Fund
ASM	Advisory Services Manager
BOC	Better Off Calculation
CETL	Customer Engagement Team Leader
CPM	Childcare Partnerships Manager
CTC	Child Tax Credit
DASO	District Administrative Support Officer
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ERA	Employment Retention and Advancement
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
FJR	Fortnightly Job Review
FND	Flexible New Deal
HMT	Her Majesty's Treasury
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
IWAS	In Work Advisory Support
IWC	In Work Credit
IWEDF	In Work Emergency Discretion Fund
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LMS	Labour Market System
LPA	Lone Parent Adviser
LPO	Lone Parent Obligation
LVP	Lower Value Procurement
MVC	More Voluntary Contact
ND+fLP	New Deal Plus for Lone Parents

NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDP	New Deal for Partners
PPERC	Parent Policy Evaluation Research Consortium
SDA	Severe Disablement Allowance
UFCC	Up-front Childcare Costs
WFI	Work Focused Interview
WFIP	Work Focused Interview for Partners
WTC	Working Tax Credit

Glossary

Anticipation effect	This includes any impacts a policy has on individuals' actions (in particular, likelihood to claim benefits) prior to the policy changes directly affecting them.
Better Off Calculations (BOC)	These are undertaken by Jobcentre Plus staff on behalf of claimants (and their partners) and provide a basic comparison between a claimant's out-of-work benefits and the in-work benefits and tax credits they would receive in employment at a specified wage. They provide a 'snapshot' in time estimate, based on information supplied by the customer, and may differ from the actual circumstances when the customer is in work.
Child Benefit (CB)	A universal benefit available to all families with children under the age of 16 or up to 20 if in full-time non-advanced education or certain types of training. The level of payment depends only on the number of children in the family, with a higher payment for the eldest child. It is not income-based.
Child poverty	There is no single, universally accepted definition of poverty in the United Kingdom. At the time of this research, the Government attached targets to a 'relative low income measure', that is, children living in households where income is 60 per cent below the British median.
Child Tax Credit (CTC)	A payment made by the Government for bringing up children. Families with children are normally eligible if their household income is no greater than £58,000.
Childcare Assist	A payment available to parents participating in New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and New Deal for Partners (NDP) to help with registered childcare costs in the week prior to starting work.
Childcare Partnerships Manager	A member of staff appointed to co-ordinate Jobcentre Plus programmes and strategies with local childcare development plans, working in partnership with local authorities and Children's Centres.
Couple	Two adults living together as if they were married (regardless of actual marital status).
Couple parent	Defined by Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as one of two adults living together as a family with one or more dependent children (regardless of whether they are the birth mother or father of the child or children in question) where one adult is the 'main claimant' and the other the non-claiming partner.

Customer	Defined by DWP, as a person in receipt of financial or other assistance from a DWP benefit, service or programme.
Dependent children	All children aged 0-15 and those aged 16-18 who are in full-time education, living in the same family unit.
Discovery Events	An intensive course developed as part of the original New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilot for lone parents who were not ready to join the NDLP programme designed to help them move closer to the labour market. In April 2008, eligibility was extended to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London Districts.
Employment part-time – mini-job	A job of less than 16 hours of work per week.
Employment – part-time	A job of 16 to 29 hours of work per week.
Employment – full-time	A job of 30 hours or more of work per week.
Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)	From 27 October 2008, ESA replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds for new customers. ESA provides financial assistance as well as personalised support for people with limited capability for work to help them move into suitable work.
Employment Zone	Employment Zones aimed to help people who have been out of work for a long time to find and stay in work. At the time of the research there were four Employment Zones across the country, all in areas with a high rate of long-term unemployment. In April 2009, Employment Zones were replaced by the Flexible New Deal programme. Flexible New Deal is being replaced by the Work Programme in 2011.
Family Unit	One or more people living together as a family (consisting of a single adult or a couple, with or without dependent children).
Flexible provision	This is available to eligible customer groups, including lone parents, main claimants and dependent partners. This allows District Managers the flexibility to purchase training courses or provision which is currently unavailable but can make a difference to customers' employment opportunities and so allows advisers greater scope to address specific needs.
Formal (or registered) childcare	Ofsted registered childcare, including day nurseries, out-of-school clubs, pre-school play groups and childminders.
Flexible New Deal (FND)	FND is a compulsory programme for all those who have been unemployed for over 12 months and are eligible to receive Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). The FND programme has four stages. The first three relate to claiming JSA with Jobcentre Plus. The fourth stage is an employment programme delivered by private or third-sector providers. FND is being replaced by the Work Programme in 2011.

Housing Benefit Run On (HBRO)	An extended payment of Housing Benefit (HB) and/or Council Tax Benefit (CTB) for the first four weeks in employment, available to certain eligible customers who were in receipt of HB and/or CTB before they started work.
Inactive	Treated by DWP to mean not working, not actively seeking work or not available to start work.
Income Support (IS)	IS is a means-tested benefit for those who do not have to sign-on as unemployed. This includes some lone parents, who are not subject to Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) or are exempt from LPO.
Informal childcare	Childcare not registered with Ofsted, including parent and toddler groups and that provided by family or friends.
In Work Credit (IWC)	A tax free, non-means-tested payment of £40 a week (£60 in London) available for up to 52 weeks to eligible lone parents leaving benefits for work of 16 hours or more. In Work Credit was also available to eligible couple parents across all London districts and in New Deal Plus for Lone Parents pilot districts for a time-limited period.
In Work Emergency Discretion Fund (IWEDF)	A fund which provides financial help to lone parents for the first 26 weeks of their employment, to overcome any unexpected financial barriers which might otherwise prevent them from remaining in their jobs. IWEDF was also available to eligible couple parents across all London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas for a time-limited period.
The In Work Retention Pilot (IWRP)	The IWRP was part of a series of policy interventions designed to encourage greater numbers of lone parents to take up paid work. It was a two-year pilot which tested the effectiveness of using wage supplements plus adviser support as an aid to job retention and progression. A mix of weekly payments, quarterly lump sum bonuses and adviser support were offered to eligible lone parents entering work of at least 16 hours per week in pilot areas.
In Work Advisory Support (IWAS)	Help available to all lone parents to ease the transition into work and to aid job retention in the first 26 weeks of employment. IWAS was also available to eligible couple parents across all London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas for a time-limited period.
Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)	JSA is the main benefit for people of working age who are out of work (or work less than 16 hours a week on average) and are available for and actively seeking work.
JSA flexibilities	These are flexibilities that have been incorporated into JSA regulations to take into account of parents' caring responsibilities for a child who is a member of their household.

Lone parent	A parent or guardian with a dependent child under 16, who is not in a co-habiting relationship.
Lone Parent Obligations (LPO)	These are changes to entitlement conditions for lone parents claiming IS, which started in November 2008. Most lone parents with children seven and over are no longer eligible for IS solely on the basis of being a lone parent, subject to certain exemptions and conditions. Instead those able to work can claim JSA and are expected to look for suitable work in return for personalised help and support. Lone parents with limited capability for work may claim ESA, if eligible.
Lone Parent adviser	A Jobcentre Plus specialist adviser who provides support to lone parents to help them enter and sustain paid employment.
Low value procurement (LVP)	LVP is one-off training that can be accessed where contracted or non-contracted provision cannot provide it. Requirements can vary from a single day's training to a number of week's activity.
Main claimant	For the purposes of this report, a main claimant is a DWP customer who is in receipt of a DWP benefit.
Mainstream (or generic) adviser	A Jobcentre Plus adviser who provides guidance and support mainly to customers claiming JSA to help them enter and sustain paid employment.
New Deal adviser	A Jobcentre Plus adviser who provides guidance and support, mainly to customers participating in mandatory New Deal programmes, including New Deal 18-24, New Deal 25+ and New Deal 50+.
New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP)	A voluntary programme of guidance and support to help lone parents enter and sustain employment,
New Deal for Partners (NDP)	A voluntary programme of guidance and support to help eligible partners of benefit claimants enter and sustain employment.
New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP)	This was introduced in selected pilot areas in April 2005 to test the delivery of an 'enhanced' package of support for lone parents. The aim was to increase the participation of lone parents in NDLP and to increase the number entering and remaining in work. Some elements of ND+fLP were rolled out nationally to lone parents and extended to couple parents in London and in ND+fLP pilot areas in April 2008. These measures include In Work Credit, Childcare Assist, In-Work Advisory Support and In-Work Emergency Discretion Fund. The pilots ran until July 2010.

Options and Choices Events	Group sessions organised for lone parents moving from IS to JSA as a result of LPO. Their purpose was to inform lone parents about the changes to IS entitlement and to raise awareness of the support available to help them develop skills and gain a better understanding of the labour market. They were a national requirement prior to September 2010, but are now discretionary.
Partner	Generally understood to mean one member of a couple. For DWP, a partner is the non-claiming partner of a main claimant.
Sanction	This is a financial penalty imposed by a Jobcentre Plus Decision Maker. It is the removal of a proportion of benefit payment due to a customer's non-compliance with conditions placed on benefit receipt .
Self-employed	People who work on their own account, whether or not they have employees, as their main job.
Unemployed	For DWP, unemployed people are 1) those who are without a job, want a job and have actively sought work in the last four weeks and are available to start work in the next two weeks or 2) those out of work, who have found a job and are waiting to start in the next two weeks.
Up-front Childcare Costs (UFCC) pilot	From April 2008, provision of financial support was piloted for lone parents in London participating in the New Deal for Lone Parents to cover advance childcare costs, such as registration fees and deposits. The pilot ended in March 2010.
Work First	An approach to delivering employment assistance measures which emphasises rapid labour market attachment and job entry.
Work Focused Interview (WFI)	This is a mandatory interview for engaging with customers, which takes place at regular, specified intervals, between a Jobcentre Plus adviser and a benefit customer (and their partner, if appropriate). The aim is to encourage and assist customers to address barriers to work and move towards sustainable employment, through accessing a range of support options.
Working Tax Credit (WTC)	WTC provides means-tested financial support on top of earnings to eligible working families. This is payable in addition to Child Benefit. Child maintenance is wholly disregarded for the calculation of WTC.

Summary

Introduction

This report summarises interim findings from the first phase of a two part qualitative evaluation of a series of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) policy measures targeted at lone and couple parents which aim to reduce child poverty and boost household income. The specific measures under consideration are as follows:

- From April 2008, the expansion of the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilot to couple parents across London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas outside London.
- From July 2007, the extension of In Work Credit (IWC) to eligible couple parents across all London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas outside London.
- From July 2008, an increase in the amount of IWC from £40 to £60 per week for eligible lone and couple parents in London districts.
- From April 2008, an Up-front Childcare Costs (UFCC) pilot to help eligible London based New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) participants who are moving into work to pay for childcare registration fees, deposits and advance payments.

The aim of the evaluation was to explore whether the measures offered an adequate package of support to parents in London and non-London pilot areas, and if the measures, either collectively or singly, encouraged them to enter and sustain work. Couple parents, in a DWP context, include both the parent claiming benefits on behalf of the family (referred to as the ‘main claimant’), and the non-claiming parent (referred to as the ‘partner’). Because of the different conditions on benefit claimants and their partners, each parent in the couple is treated individually within Jobcentre Plus.

Given the existing body of research and evidence on lone parents, this research focused on the measures which had been newly expanded to couple parents across all London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas. IWC of £60, and the UFCC pilot affecting eligible parents in London are addressed in the final report of the research.

This report covers early implementation, delivery and operational issues, together with awareness and use of ND+fLP and IWC by Jobcentre Plus staff, main claimant parents and partner parents.

Policy background

Reducing child poverty has been one of the most important policy goals of the last decade. Because nearly half of children living in poverty were living with a single, workless parent, policy focus was originally on supporting lone parents into work. Since more than half of poor children live in two parent households, there was growing recognition that policy needed to focus more on couple parents. Lisa Harker, in her 2006 report for DWP *Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take?*¹ called for welfare to work programmes to be better attuned to the needs of all parents, not just lone parents. In response, in 2007, DWP began introducing a series of policy measures designed to better align the help on offer to couple parents with that previously only available to lone parents.

¹ Lisa Harker (2006). *Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take?* A report for the Department for Work and Pensions.

New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and In Work Credit

The ND+fLP pilot was launched in five English Jobcentre Plus areas in April 2005 and expanded to Wales and Scotland in September 2006. In April 2008, ND+fLP was extended to include lone and couple parents across all London districts and to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas outside London. The ND+fLP 'offer' comprised several different elements which together make up the package of measures in place in London districts and pilot areas outside London throughout the period of the pilot extension. The pilot ran until July 2010, since when some of the measures which had been rolled out nationally, including IWC, have still been available to lone parents.

- **Discovery Events:** an intensive course introduced as part of the original ND+fLP pilot to increase the number of lone parents joining NDLP. In April 2008, eligibility was extended to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London districts.
- **More Voluntary Contact (MVC):** was introduced as part of the original ND+fLP pilot for lone parents whom it was thought would benefit from adviser help and advice between mandatory appointments, but who have not joined a New Deal programme. MVC was extended, in April 2008, to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London districts.
- **Childcare Assist:** the payment of registered childcare during the week immediately prior to a parent starting work. It was introduced within the original ND+fLP pilot in 2005 and extended to eligible partners in April 2008 in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London districts.
- **Access to flexible training provision:** an additional resource introduced in ND+fLP pilot areas in 2005 to enable the procurement of new training provision not available elsewhere which could improve access to employment among lone parents. In April 2008, eligibility was extended to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London districts.
- **In Work Emergency Discretion Fund (IWEDF):** provides financial help to lone parents for the first 26 weeks of employment to help overcome unexpected financial barriers. In April 2008, IWEDF was rolled out nationally to eligible lone parents and extended to eligible couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London districts.
- **In Work Advisory Support (IWAS):** provides advisory help to lone parents to ease the transition into work and to aid job retention in the first 26 weeks of employment. In April 2008, IWAS was rolled out nationally to all eligible lone parents and extended to eligible couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London districts.
- **In Work Credit (IWC):** is a tax free, non-means-tested payment of £40 a week (£60 in London) available for up to 52 weeks to eligible lone parents leaving benefits for work of 16 hours per week or more. In April 2008, IWC was rolled out nationally to all eligible lone parents and extended to eligible couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London districts.

Additional operational resources were provided to pilot areas to support the implementation of the measures including:

- enhanced training for advisers;
- additional administrative support for advisers;
- an additional Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM);
- a marketing package.

Qualitative evaluations of the original ND+fLP pilot and its expansion to Wales and Scotland found that the package of support was working well and was popular with both Lone Parent advisers (LPAs) and lone parent customers.² IWC was adjudged to be the most effective of the measures in terms of encouraging lone parents to make the transition from benefits to work. Impact studies confirmed the dominance of IWC compared with other ND+fLP measures.³

Research methods

The first phase of fieldwork in 2009 involved case studies in two pilot areas, one in London and one outside London, approximately one year after the last of the measures were introduced. The fieldwork comprised individual, face-to-face interviews with 61 couple parents of whom 31 were main claimant parents, and 30 partner parents. In all but three cases, interviews were conducted with each parent in a couple.

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were also conducted with 14 Jobcentre Plus staff appointed to implement the pilot including the pilot manager and CPM, together with staff involved in the wider delivery of the measures. In addition, three focus group discussions were held with a total of 22 advisory staff, including LPAs and mainstream advisers drawn from different Jobcentre Plus offices in the case study areas.

Implementation of the pilot extension

Supporting parents through the back to work journey had, until the recent introduction of new parent policies, been the exclusive domain of LPAs operating in specialist teams. In extending the support and eligibility for the measures to main claimant parents and their partners, parental issues also became the responsibility of mainstream advisers operating in locally managed teams in the context of mandatory jobseeking regimes and programmes.

The evidence from this research suggests that this much wider customer reach, involving mainstream as well as lone parent advisers, resulted in a diminution in the profile of the pilot. In the London pilot, the different ND+fLP elements were found to have been subsumed under the umbrella of the 'London Parent Offer,' the pilot team was disbanded and additional resources provided for the extension distributed to local Jobcentre Plus offices as part of the wider lone parent offer. LPAs were not, however, involved in supporting main claimant and partner parents; rather, mainstream advisers were. These advisers typically had no expertise in or experience of parental matters and support.

In the pilot outside London, the additional resource was ring fenced, enabling the retention of the original pilot team. Here, LPAs were given responsibility for supporting partners. However, as in London, mainstream advisers with limited experience of supporting parents were given the task of supporting main claimant parents.

² Hosain, M. and Breen, E. (2007). *New Deal Plus for Lone Parents qualitative evaluation*, DWP Research Report 426. and Jenkins (2008), *Extension of the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents Pilots to Scotland and Wales: qualitative evaluation*, DWP Research Report 499.

³ There was no robust evidence that the impact of the lone parent pilots was any greater in pilot districts where ND+fLP was in place, than in pilot districts where only IWC was in place. See Brewer, M. (2009). *The lone parent pilots 24–36 month: the final impact assessment of In-Work Credit, Work Search Premium, Extended Schools Childcare, Quarterly Work Focused Interviews and New Deal Plus for Lone Parents*. DWP Research Report 606.

In both case study areas, team leaders working in local Jobcentre Plus offices were responsible for cascading information about the new couple parent measures down to relevant staff according to local priorities and delivery arrangements. Staff formerly involved in the pilot had limited control over how the measures were being delivered and there was no co-ordination or consistency in the approaches adopted. There was a belief among pilot staff that key messages about the extension may not have been communicated to all relevant advisers, nor to all couple parents who might have been eligible for the measures.

A further issue was the timing of the extension, introduced in parallel with a series of other important policies and measures affecting lone and couple parents and at a time of unprecedented demand for mainstream Jobcentre Plus services. Particularly in the London case study pilot, the research found that couple parent policies and measures had taken 'a back seat.'

Engagement and response of main claimant parents

Mainstream advisers interviewed in this research who were responsible for supporting main claimant parents, had low levels of awareness and understanding of the extension of ND+fLP and IWC to couple parents. Low awareness was especially marked in London. Parental issues were seen as frequently peripheral to the main task of moving their customers swiftly into work, against which their performance was measured.

Short and routine meetings in which parental matters rarely figured strongly featured in the testimonies of main claimants, particularly those living in London. Also absent had been a couple or family perspective to the help provided. Advisers seemed to focus exclusively on the individual claimant, seemingly unaware or unsure of how to relate to the presence of a non-working partner and children in the household.

Engagement and response of partner parents

In the non-London pilot, Lone Parent advisers were mostly responsible for supporting partners, giving them equal priority to, and using the same techniques as they did with their lone parent customers. However, not all of the LPAs felt they had the right knowledge and skills; some believed partners faced a different set of barriers to lone parents, requiring a different approach and expertise.

In the London pilot, partners were supported by mainstream advisers many of whom viewed partners as a group set apart from their mandatory customers and Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) as a distraction from their main role of helping unemployed customers into work.

Partners in London generally reported short, perfunctory meetings with advisers. Many felt the advice was rushed and cursory, and the support on offer unconnected with their role as parents. Some had been told that, as partners, they were not eligible for help. Partners outside London reported longer meetings, but none of them had taken up any of the pilot measures.

In both areas, mainstream advisers tended to assume that the partner (usually female) was the main carer, and the main claimant (usually the male) the jobseeker, and to treat them accordingly. However, the reverse was often the case and it was not uncommon for both parents in the couple to be interested in work. Included in this group were partners who wanted to work but were waiting for the claiming parent to move into work first. Advisers seemed unsure what to do if partners viewed work as a future possibility, but were not immediately work ready.

Awareness and take up of ND+fLP measures

In neither case study area had any of the main claimant parents interviewed taken up any of the ND+fLP measures; indeed none had heard of, or were aware of their eligibility for, the measures.

In the non-London pilot area, a few partners who were interviewed had heard of some of the ND+fLP measures but none had taken any of them up. However, in the London pilot area, partners had no awareness of the measures and none had taken them up.

Awareness and take up of In Work Credit

In both pilot areas, take up of IWC among couple parents was reported to be extremely low. A few partners were believed to have taken up IWC, but none of the staff interviewed had any experience of using IWC with main claimant parents. The strict eligibility criteria, affecting both main claimants and their partners, were thought by staff to be a key reason for the low take up of IWC, although some eligibility rules were subsequently relaxed. Believing some couple parents may be little better off in work had also made advisers reluctant to promote IWC for fear of overselling the benefits.

None of the couple parents interviewed had taken up IWC and very few had heard of it. Simply being no worse off or only a little better off in work, was not a persuasive message for many couple parents interviewed. Before risking leaving benefits, they needed reassurance that jobs would sustain and earnings, whether singly or jointly, would be sufficient to cover the family's housing costs and basic living expenses.

Interim findings and policy implications

There was little evidence from the two case study areas to indicate that the extension of ND+fLP had succeeded in its aim of offering couple parents support on a par with, or comparable to, the help available to lone parents. Nor was there any evidence that any of the extended measures, including IWC, had any demonstrable effect in encouraging couple parents to take up or sustain work. A combination of delivery, operational and policy design issues may help explain why many couple parents might have missed out on receiving appropriate support.

The architecture and underlying ethos of service delivery appeared to be one important factor. Mainstream advisers struggled to engage with their customers as parents, particularly in the context of mandatory jobseeking regimes. LPAs, on the other hand, accustomed to providing specialist, voluntary help for lone parents, managed much better. However, in neither area were main claimant parents being supported by LPAs and, in London, nor were partners. The majority of couple parents, therefore, were neither benefiting from specialist adviser support, nor receiving help which explicitly took their parenting role and responsibilities into account.

The better off in work message may also have been a less persuasive tool when used with couple parents, possibly due to the operation of the tax and benefits system when there are two parents rather than one present in the household. A concern to avoid becoming trapped in low paid work certainly appeared to resonate strongly for many couple parents interviewed. The greater tendency for couple parents to have larger families and to be homeowners may also have been significant due to the differential impact these factors can have on household income and expenditure when one or both parents move from benefits into work. These issues are explored more fully during the second phase of fieldwork.

A policy of supporting couple parents separately, rather than together, may also be unhelpful, given that work-related decisions are generally made jointly in couples. Help to assist both parents in a couple find suitable work in tandem or in close succession, if that is what they want, may be more effective, but would require changes to current policy and adviser working practices.

The evidence from the research suggested that it may be mistaken to assume that the circumstances of couple parents, the barriers they can face and the kind of support they might need in moving from benefits to work, will automatically be the same as those of lone parents simply because they have children. As such, the research raised some important issues about how best to support out of work and low income couples with children. These are explored further during the next phase of the evaluation and covered in the final report.

1 Introduction and background

1.1 Introduction

This report presents findings from the first phase of a two part qualitative evaluation of a series of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) policy measures which aimed to reduce child poverty through offering a more customised and flexible package of support to help lone and couple parents enter and retain work. Couple parents, in a DWP context, include both the parent claiming benefits on behalf of the family (referred to throughout the text as the ‘main claimant’), and the non-claiming parent (referred to as the ‘partner’). Because of the different conditions on benefit claimants and their partners, each parent in the couple is treated individually within Jobcentre Plus.

The specific measures under consideration across both phases of research were:

- From April 2008, the expansion of the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilot to couple parents across London districts and in NDfLP pilot areas outside London.
- From July 2007, the extension of In Work Credit (IWC) to eligible couple parents across London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas outside London.
- From July 2008, an increase in the amount of IWC from £40 to £60 per week for eligible lone and couple parents in London districts.
- From April 2008 to March 2010, an Up-Front Childcare Costs (UFCC) pilot to help eligible London based New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) participants who are moving into work to pay for childcare registration fees, deposits and advance payments.

Both phases of research were qualitative involving in-depth, face-to-face interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and parent customers in two ND+fLP pilot areas, one in London and one in the West Midlands. The aim of the evaluation was to explore, through interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and customers, whether the support offered an adequate support package to parents in London and non-London pilot areas, and if the measures, either collectively or singly, encouraged them to enter and sustain work.

Given existing research and evidence about ND+fLP and IWC, this part of the evaluation focused on those measures which have been extended to couple parents across all London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas. Couple parents in this context include the parent claiming benefits on behalf of the family (the ‘main claimant’) and the non-claiming parent (the ‘partner’).⁴ Due to particular policy interest in London-specific issues and measures, specific attention is being paid to London-based delivery.

The increase in IWC from £40 to £60 which affected eligible lone and couple parents in London, together with UFCC which was piloted in London with lone parents participating in the NDLP, are addressed in the second part of the research. The inclusion of lone parents enabled comparisons to be made between the views and experiences of lone and couple parents.

⁴ See the Glossary for fuller definitions of ‘couple’ parent, ‘main claimant’ parent and ‘partner’ parent.’

1.2 Background

Reducing child poverty has been one of the most important policy goals of the last decade. By 2006, significant progress had been made with 700,000 fewer children living in poor households, compared to 1998, and relative child poverty at a 15 year low. Making further inroads on the three million or so children who remained in poverty was proving to be more challenging. Nevertheless, a consensus exists around the aim of eradicating child poverty. How best to achieve this longer term goal is now the main focus of policy.

The risk of poverty remains particularly high in families with children in which no one works. Work is seen by the Government as the most sustainable route out of poverty and, since the late 1990's, a series of 'welfare to work' policies and programmes have been implemented to increase parental employment. Specific measures include: the introduction of mandatory work focused interviews (WFI) for lone parents claiming Income Support (IS) and for the non-working partners of benefit claimants; New Deal programmes to support the transition from benefits to work; and changes to the tax and benefits system to incentivise work and ensure that work pays.

Because nearly half of children living in poverty live with a single parent, the original policy focus was on supporting lone parents into work. During a period of economic growth and stability, the policy achieved notable success and a substantial body of research and evidence now exists on the impact and effectiveness of the various measures introduced. However, since more than half of poor children live in two parent households, there has been growing recognition that policy needs to focus additionally on couple parents.⁵ Continuing high levels of child poverty in London also need to be tackled if the national goal is to be met.

1.3 Delivering on child poverty

Lisa Harker, in her 2006 report for DWP '*Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take?*'⁶ highlighted the necessity of further policy changes if the goal of eradicating child poverty is to be reached. Among other things, she called for welfare to work programmes to be better attuned to the needs of all parents, not just lone parents. Unlike lone parents claiming IS, claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), have not had their parenting needs or family commitments routinely taken into account within Welfare to Work regimes and programmes. Help of this kind, she said, should be available to all parents claiming benefits, not just lone parents.⁷

⁵ Couple parent, in a DWP context, is one of two adults living together as a family with one or more dependent children where one adult is the 'main claimant' and the other the non-claiming 'partner.'

⁶ Lisa Harker (November 2006) *Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take?* A report for the Department for Work and Pensions.

⁷ Lisa Harker (2006) p16.

Rather than prescribing what support is available to customers according to their age and benefit entitlement, benefit claimants should be viewed, she said, in the wider context of the family, with support more ‘family focused’ and tailored to their specific needs and circumstances.⁸ A key recommendation was that support and eligibility for help among lone and couple parents should be more closely aligned. London, where child poverty is most prevalent but has fallen by less than elsewhere in the UK, also warranted separate and specific attention.⁹

In response to the Harker report, and with a view to increasing the family focus of welfare-to-work programmes, in 2007, DWP began introducing a series of policy measures intended to offer a more customised and flexible package of support to help both lone and couple parents enter and sustain work. In extending the support available to couple parents, the intention was to better align the help on offer with that previously only offered to lone parents.

1.4 New Deal Plus for Lone Parents, In Work Credit and other parent policy measures

The ND+fLP pilot was originally introduced in five English Jobcentre Plus areas – North London, Southeast London, Sandwell and Dudley, Leicestershire and Bradford – in April 2005. The pilots were based on the voluntary NDLP programme that had been in place since 1998, offering additional voluntary services for eligible lone parents alongside NDLP. In September 2006, the ND+fLP pilot was extended to Cardiff and Vale in Wales and Edinburgh in Scotland. Then, in April 2008, ND+fLP was extended further to include lone and couple parents across all London Jobcentre Plus districts¹⁰ and couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas outside London.

The ND+fLP ‘offer’ comprised several different elements some of which were part of the original pilot, some not, but which together make up the integrated package of measures in place from April 2008.¹¹ The pilot ran until July 2010, since when some of the measures which had been rolled out nationally, including IWC, have still been available to lone parents.

Included in the ND+fLP offer were the following pre-employment support measures:

- Discovery Events.
- More Voluntary Contact (MVC).
- Childcare Assist.
- Access to flexible training provision (flexible provision).

⁸ Lisa Harker (2006) p8.

⁹ This is due to a combination of factors, including lower rates of parental employment; mothers’ employment rates are lower in London than in other parts of the country, for example, and there are also fewer dual earning families. *London Child Poverty Commission 2006: Monitoring child poverty in London*; inner London has particularly high rates of child poverty due mainly to a concentration of groups at a disadvantage in the labour market.

¹⁰ The districts are: West London; Central London; City and East; South London; Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth; and North and North East London.

¹¹ Further details of each measure, including descriptions of its main features and eligibility criteria, are included later in the report.

10 Introduction and background

Post employment support measures comprised¹²:

- IWC.
- In Work Emergency Discretion Fund (IWEDF).
- In Work Advisory Support (IWAS).

IWC pre-dates the introduction of ND+fLP. It was introduced in April 2004 on a pilot basis in three Jobcentre Plus districts (including two in London) as a tax free payment of £40 payable weekly to lone parents who were in receipt of IS or JSA for 52 weeks, and who started work of at least 16 hours a week. The aim of IWC is to reduce parents' concerns about their ability to cope financially when leaving benefits, to support the transition from benefits to work and to encourage them to remain in work longer than they might otherwise have.

In April 2005, IWC was extended to all London Districts (with the exception of Northeast London)¹³ and expanded to include all eligible London-based lone and couple parents. In July 2007, IWC was increased in London districts to £60 per week. In the most recent policy development, from April 2008, IWC, together with IWAS and IWEDF, were extended nationally to all eligible lone parents as part of a wider package of in-work services for lone parents. The national roll out of IWC, outside London, has been evaluated separately¹⁴.

Both the original ND+fLP pilot and its extension, which is the focus of this report, also provided additional operational resources to pilot areas to help support the implementation of the measures including:

- enhanced training for advisers;
- additional administrative support for advisers;
- an additional Childcare Partnership Manager (CPM);
- a marketing package.

Qualitative evaluations of the original ND+fLP pilot and its expansion to Wales and Scotland were published in 2007 and 2008 respectively.¹⁵ These found that, overall, the package seemed to be working well and was popular with both Lone Parent advisers (LPAs) and lone parent customers. IWC, in particular, was adjudged to be the most effective and persuasive of the measures in terms of encouraging lone parents to make the transition from benefits to work, particularly when presented with a Better-Off Calculation (BOC).¹⁶ Impact studies confirmed the dominance of IWC compared with other ND+fLP measures. Findings suggested there was little robust evidence to

¹² IWC, IWEDF and IWAS were rolled out nationally to all lone parents from April 2008.

¹³ North East London was excluded due to its involvement in the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration project which offered a retention bonus to lone parents, rather than IWC. After the conclusion of ERA, IWC was made available in North East London from January 2008. North East London is now part of the merged North and North East London district.

¹⁴ *Supporting lone parents' journey off benefits and into work: a qualitative evaluation of the role of In Work Credit*, Sims et al., DWP Research Report number 712, November 2010.

¹⁵ Hosain, M. and Breen, E. (2007) *New Deal Plus for Lone Parents qualitative evaluation*, DWP Research Report 426. and Jenkins (2008) *Extension of the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents Pilots to Scotland and Wales: qualitative evaluation*, DWP Research Report 499.

¹⁶ Jenkins 2008.

support the hypothesis that the pilots had made the overall package of help any more effective at getting lone parents off benefit and into work than IWC alone.¹⁷

At the back of this report are references which include previous research and evaluation reports on ND+fLP, together with other relevant parent related reports and policy documents.

1.5 Wider policy context

Concurrent with the extension of ND+fLP and IWC was the phased implementation of a series of policy changes and measures affecting lone and couple parents. In 2008, Lone Parent Obligations (LPO) were introduced, which progressively affected different groups of lone parents claiming IS. From November 2008, lone parents with children over the age of 12 lost their eligibility to claim IS solely on the grounds of being a lone parent. Since then, the age of the youngest child has been progressively lowered, currently standing at seven, with plans to reduce it further to five as part of the Welfare Reform Bill. Lone parents who lose entitlement to IS must instead claim JSA or other benefits appropriate to their circumstances.

To support the introduction of LPO, from April 2008, complementary measures included the national roll out of a range of services previously only available to lone parents in selected Jobcentre Plus and ND+fLP pilot areas including IWC, IWEDF and IWAS.

New JSA flexibilities support the introduction of LPO. Parents claiming JSA are subject to the same legal requirements as other job seekers. However, in recognition of a need to care for children, a number of flexibilities have been introduced into the JSA regime, including amendments to good and just cause for signing on late which might otherwise result in benefit disallowances or sanctions, and the ability of some parents, under certain conditions, to restrict their availability for work.

To promote the importance of identifying and addressing any childcare barriers and to gather details of any gaps in local childcare provision, from April 2008, Jobcentre Plus staff have also been required to capture in a child details marker, and regularly review, information for all benefit customers about the number and ages of any dependent children¹⁸ together with any childcare barriers.

Other DWP policies affecting (though not specifically targeted on) Jobcentre Plus customers with dependent children and which were implemented within the timescale of the ND+fLP pilots include: the introduction in 2008 of the ESA to replace Incapacity Benefit (IB) and IS for new claimants with a health condition or disability, the national rollout of the Pathways to Work programme, delivered primarily by private and third sector organisations; and from October 2009 the phased introduction of Flexible New Deal to replace all mandatory and voluntary New Deal programmes.

Policies targeting partners have also been changing. Six monthly mandatory WFIs were introduced in April 2009 for the partners of JSA claimants for as long as the claim is live. Partners of those claiming IS, ESA, IB or Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) are only required to attend a one-off Work Focused Interview for Partners (WFIP) 26 weeks after registration of a claim.

¹⁷ There was no robust evidence that the impact of the lone parent pilots was any greater in pilot districts where ND+fLP was in place, than in pilot districts where only IWC was in place. See Brewer *et al.* (2009).

¹⁸ See the glossary for the definition of dependent children in a DWP context.

1.6 Evaluation aims and objectives

The overall aims and objectives of the evaluation were to provide evidence to inform the following research questions:

- Does the extension of ND+fLP offer an adequate support package to couple parents both in London and non-London districts?
- Do the policy measures enhance take-up of support and encourage parents to sustain work through the increase in IWC and offering payment of childcare costs through the UFCC pilot in London?
- Do the pilot extension and new policy measures offer all parent customers a better ‘family focus’ in policy delivery, as recommended in Lisa Harker’s report on child poverty?

The general research objectives for both London and non-London districts were:

- to identify operational and implementation issues regarding expanding ND+fLP provision to couple parents;
- to ascertain the level of awareness of engagement with ND+fLP, IWC and other parent specific measures among eligible couple parents;
- to examine whether main claimant parents and partner parents engage differently with ND+fLP and IWC, and whether they engage differently from lone parents;
- to provide evidence to ascertain the extent to which the policy measures under consideration encourage couple parents to enter and remain in work.

Additional research objectives relating to London-specific measures were:

- to identify operational and implementation issues regarding expanding ND+fLP to couple parents in existing pilot districts, rolling it out to new districts and the introduction of the UFCC pilot in London districts;
- to determine the level of awareness and participation of NDLP participants in the UFCC pilot and to identify how ineligible parents pay for up-front childcare costs;
- to examine clients’ and staff’s perceptions of the impact of increased IWC on lone and couple parents’ employment outcomes.

This first phase of research focused on exploring the research questions around implementation and delivery of ND+fLP and IWC to couple parents.

The second phase focused more on issues around parents’ attitudes towards and experiences of work and childcare more generally. It also considered the issue of employment retention among parents, including lone parents who had taken up IWC, as well as the UFCC pilot in London. Findings from the second phase are covered in the accompanying final evaluation report¹⁹.

19 *Helping more parents move into work: an evaluation of the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents and In Work Credit*, Griffiths, R., DWP Research Report 732, 2011

1.7 Evaluation methods

1.7.1 Qualitative approach

A qualitative approach based on in depth, face-to-face interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and the three types of parent customer (main claimant parents, partner parents and lone parents) was deemed most appropriate to meeting the research objectives. Depth interviews allow for evidence to be produced which is grounded in the experiences and perceptions of both the people delivering the policy (staff) and the intended beneficiaries (customers). In this way, qualitative research enables a more detailed and rounded understanding to be constructed of delivery processes and of the influence they may have on the operation and effectiveness of policy measures. Findings are not intended to be representative, but help to identify what is working, or not working, for whom, under what circumstances, and why.

1.7.2 Selection of areas

To minimise the operational impact of fieldwork in Jobcentre Plus offices at a time of unprecedented rises in the JSA claimant count, the research was designed to take place in as small a number of Jobcentre Plus delivery districts as possible without compromising the research aims and objectives. Three pilot districts, two in London, were initially identified to ensure coverage of the different policy measures targeted on different customer groups in the different locations at different times, and to allow for the separate consideration of London-based measures and delivery. One London district included a pre-April 2008 pilot area which had been involved in ND+fLP since 2005; the other district was a post April 2008 pilot in which ND+fLP had been newly implemented in April 2008. The non-London district selected was one of the original ND+fLP pilot areas which had been involved in the initiative since 2005.

At an early stage of their involvement in the research, the London district in which ND+fLP had been newly expanded withdrew from the research due to operational pressures. Fortunately, the remaining London district had relatively recently been formed through merging two smaller districts, one of which had been a pre-April 2008 pilot and one a post April 2008 pilot. The involvement of this enlarged single district, therefore, enabled the inclusion of an original and a new ND+fLP pilot area in London. However, because there are only two districts included in the research, each area is being dealt with as an individual case study.

1.7.3 Longitudinal approach

Some of the measures being evaluated had only relatively recently been introduced at the time of the research. Two periods of fieldwork were, therefore, conducted to enable a distinction to be drawn between early implementation issues and longer term issues of potentially greater substance and significance.

The first phase of fieldwork took place between May and August 2009; twelve months after the extension of ND+fLP had been launched in April 2008. The second phase took place between April and July 2010. These were considered suitable periods of elapsed time over which to draw these important distinctions and to enable levels of awareness and engagement with the measures to build.

The two phases of fieldwork involved a group of the same staff and customers at each phase to enable views, experiences and outcomes to be tracked over time. However, although the aim was to re-interview, as far as possible, the same group of Jobcentre Plus staff in the second phase of fieldwork, very few of the staff who were originally interviewed were available for re-interviewing²⁰.

Follow-up interviews were also held with a number of the previous interviewees who had since moved into work and taken up IWC or ND+fLP measures. The intention was to identify any linkages between delivery processes, take up of the policy measures and customer outcomes. Since only a proportion of customers were likely to have moved into paid work in the intervening period, this group was boosted by a sample drawn from DWP administrative data.

As the focus of phase one was on delivery of the measures to couples, no interviews were held with lone parents at that time. Lone parents were included in the phase two fieldwork, in order to explore further IWC and the UFCC pilot measure.

1.7.4 Couple perspectives

Because they are part of an overall household unit, the expectation is that the employment aspirations and job search behaviour of claiming parents and their partners will each likely affect the other. To give a better understanding of joint thinking about work within parent couples, interviews with main claimants and partners included both in the couple. Individual, rather than joint interviews, were carried out, however. Separate interviews were considered to be a more effective way of establishing individual intentions and attitudes towards work and caring, while allowing for consideration of how much such decision making is affected by the other partner's point of view. Interviews with individual couple parents were also intended to capture and more accurately reflect Jobcentre Plus delivery in which main claimant parents and non-claiming partners are engaged separately, usually by different advisers working in different teams.

1.7.5 Customer sampling

Uncertainty over restrictions on data transfer between DWP and external research contractors at the start of the evaluation (November 2008) meant that customer samples could not be drawn using DWP administrative data. Observations of meetings between main claimant and partner customers and advisers in a selection of Jobcentre Plus offices in the pilot areas were used instead. Researchers based in Jobcentre Plus offices in the selected area identified samples randomly. Customers attending Jobcentre Plus for a variety of reasons were asked for their consent to be observed during their meeting with an adviser. Following the meeting, parent customers we re-requested to take part in a face-to-face interview at their own homes. Customers were asked if their partner might also be willing to be interviewed. Contact details were taken for those who consented to take part in the research and a home interview was later arranged by telephone.

Observations are a useful way of gaining additional information about what happens during Jobcentre Plus interventions, but they are logistically complex and a somewhat 'hit and miss' method of sampling. Difficulties identifying main claimant parents and a lower than anticipated volume of partners attending Jobcentre Plus offices in London for mandatory WFIPs,²¹ meant that observations needed to be conducted over an elapsed period of three months before sufficient numbers of potential interviewees could be identified.

²⁰ This is discussed further in the accompanying final report.

²¹ In some of the London Jobcentre Plus offices, WFIPs were not taking place at the time the research was carried out. This was not known about in advance and only came to light during observations.

1.8 Phase 1 fieldwork

1.8.1 Scoping visits

Scoping visits took place in December 2008 and January 2009 in each of the selected case study areas. The visits enabled researchers to establish contact with pilot staff, to be briefed regarding operational matters and delivery arrangements, and to agree a communication strategy and fieldwork schedule for the parts of the evaluation involving Jobcentre Plus staff and advisers. This familiarisation process also helped to inform the development of research instruments.

1.8.2 Staff interviews and focus groups

Fieldwork with Jobcentre Plus staff was conducted between March and July 2009 in three areas: two within the same Jobcentre Plus district in London (the London pilot) and one ND+fLP pilot area located outside of London (the non-London pilot).

The following Jobcentre Plus staff were interviewed or took part in focus groups:

- ND+fLP pilot manager.
- Childcare Partnership Manager.
- Lone Parent Adviser.
- Mainstream adviser.
- New Deal adviser.
- Advisory Services Manager.
- District manager.
- Administration officer.

Table 1.1 shows a breakdown of the number of staff involved in the research during phase 1, according to job title and area.

Table 1.1 Sample structure of Phase 1 staff interviews and focus groups

Job title	London original pilot	London new pilot	Non-London pilot	Total
Pilot manager	1	-	1	2
Childcare Partnerships Manager	1	1	1	3
Advisory Services Manager	2	1	1	4
District manager	1	-	1	2
Customer Engagement Team Leader	-	1	1	2
District Administrative Support Officer	-	-	1	1
Lone Parent Adviser	4	3	6	13
Mainstream Adviser	3	2	4	9
Totals	12	8	16	36

Staff appointed to implement the pilot including the designated pilot manager, Childcare Partnerships Managers and District Administrative Support Officer (DASO) were interviewed face-to-face. Telephone interviews were held with District Managers.

Three adviser focus groups were also held: one in an original London ND+fLP pilot area; one in a newly extended London pilot area; and one in a pilot area outside London. Focus groups were attended by a mix of advisers including LPA, mainstream advisers, New Claims advisers, Restart advisers and New Deal advisers, drawn from different Jobcentre Plus offices in the selected areas. For simplification, all advisers supporting main claimants are referred to in this report as mainstream advisers, although in practice a range of different advisers are likely to be involved supporting main claimants at different stages of the back to work journey.

Interviews and discussions with staff lasted between 40 minutes and an hour and a half and were framed by a semi-structured interview or discussion guide specific to their particular role and area of expertise. Examples of topic and discussion guides used in the face-to-face interviews and focus groups with staff are included in Appendix A.

All staff interviews and focus groups were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for the purposes of analysis. Quotes used in the report are reproduced with the consent of research respondents. However, to ensure the anonymity of participants, some quotes do not identify the specific job title of interviewees.

1.8.3 Customer observations and interviews

A total of 73 observations of meetings and adviser interviews were conducted between May and July 2009; 23 of main claimants and 50 of partners. Observations took place at three Jobcentre Plus offices in London, two in the original pilot area and one in the new pilot area; and in four Jobcentre Plus offices in the non-London pilot area.

Individual, depth, face-to-face interviews were then conducted with 61 customers who had consented to take part in the research (among whom either the main claimant or the partner had been observed). Of these, 31 were main claimants and 30 partners. All but three interviews (2 main claimants and 1 partner) included each parent in the couple, representing a total of 29 couples.

Table 1.2 presents a breakdown of achieved customer interviews during Phase 1 according to the type of customer and the pilot area.

Table 1.2 Sample structure for Phase 1 couple parent interviews

District	Client group			Total
	Lone parents	Partners	Main claimants	
London ND+fLP pilot district	-	13	14	27
London non-pilot district ¹	-	3	3	6
Non-London pilot district	-	14	14	28
Total	-	30	31	61

Total number of London interviews 33 (16 partners, 17 main claimants).

Total number of non-London interviews 28 (14 partners, 14 main claimants).

¹ The number of interviews held with couple parents in the non-London pilot was much lower than intended due to the fact that WFIs with partners, the principal route for sampling couple parents, were not taking place in this part of the district when fieldwork was being carried out. See 1.8 for further information.

Hour long interviews were conducted face-to-face in customers' homes using semi-structured topic guides. Examples of topic guides used in the face-to-face interviews with main claimant parents and partner parents are included in Appendix A. Interviews took place between May and August 2009, a little over a year after the last of the measures had been implemented.

All customer interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed for the purposes of analysis. Anonymised quotes used in the report are reproduced with the consent of research respondents. Quotes are presented verbatim and include vernacular language and forms of speech used by speakers of English as a second language.

1.9 Methodological note

The complex and decentralised delivery arrangements into which the extended measures were launched, together with operational difficulties around the delivery of WFIPs in the London pilot district,²² presented complications for the research. Even for staff specifically charged with implementing the pilots, separating out identifiable effects of the different measures being evaluated and with respect to the different customer groups, proved to be a major challenge. Very low levels of awareness and understanding of the pilot measures among staff also tested the skills of researchers. Lines of questioning and areas of interest anticipated when topic and discussion guides were designed (for example, views on the use and effectiveness of the measures) could not be pursued in many cases, and are not, therefore, covered in this report.

Very low levels of awareness and take up of the measures among customers, too, raised some methodological issues. The fact that none of the couple parents interviewed had taken up any of the measures, and very few had even heard of them, also made anticipated lines of questioning redundant. Researchers were required to give potted descriptions of IWC and ND+fLP measures during interviews, then ask customers for their views on the basis of the descriptions given. General opinions of their engagement as parents, but also as customers of Jobcentre Plus more generally, together with exploratory views and attitudes towards the measures, thus serve as substitutes for direct experience. While these findings are relevant and interesting, the fact that none of the parents interviewed had any prior knowledge or experience of the measures at the time of the research needs to be born in mind when reading this report.

To take account of the methodological issues described above, but also in recognition of the early stage of pilot implementation, the findings presented in this report are provisional. For the same reason, specific recommendations are not presented in this report, but included in the accompanying final report. The accompanying final report includes a purposive sample of lone parents, main claimant parents and partner parents who have moved into work and taken up IWC or ND+fLP measures. It addresses customers' views and experiences of the measures more directly, as well as providing a useful comparison between working and non-working couples and between couple parents and lone parents. Coverage of research objectives relating to lone parents including awareness and take up of UFCC and IWC of £60, are also addressed. The final report focuses less on implementation and delivery issues and more on parents' experiences and attitudes towards work and caring more generally.

²² At the time of the research, in several London Jobcentre Plus offices WFIPs were not being conducted at all.

1.10 The phase 1 report

This report presents early findings following completion of the first phase of fieldwork and focuses on the measures which had been newly expanded to main claimant parents and partner parents across London districts and in ND+fLP pilot areas outside of London. It covers early implementation, delivery arrangement and operational issues regarding the expansion of ND+fLP and IWC to couple parents, together with awareness, engagement and attitudes towards the measures by Jobcentre Plus staff, main claimant parents and partner parents. Because main claimants and partners are engaged differently within Jobcentre Plus, they are treated separately within the report.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 explores the way in which the pilot extension has been implemented in the selected pilot areas, examining the use and effectiveness of additional resources and operational support measures provided to pilot Districts.
- Chapter 3 presents pilot delivery arrangements and their reception by main claimants, and examines how effectively main claimant parents are being engaged and supported within Jobcentre Plus.
- Chapter 4 presents pilot delivery arrangements and their reception by partners, examining how effectively partner parents are being engaged and supported within Jobcentre Plus.
- Chapter 5 explores the delivery of pre-employment support measures, together with the views, experiences and attitudes of staff and customers.
- Chapter 6 explores the delivery of post-employment support measures, together with the views, experiences and attitudes of staff and customers.
- Chapter 7 presents interim findings and indicative policy implications.

2 Pilot implementation

This chapter explores the way in which the pilot extension has been implemented and is being delivered in the two selected districts, examining the use and effectiveness of additional resources and operational support measures provided to each pilot. It draws on face-to-face interviews conducted with staff appointed as part of the original pilot including pilot managers and Childcare Partnerships Managers (CPM), together with staff involved in the wider delivery of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) and In Work Credit (IWC) including mainstream advisers and Lone Parent advisers (LPAs).

2.1 Operational context

Supporting parents through the back to work journey has, until the recent introduction of new parent policies, been the exclusive domain of LPAs operating in specialist teams. The original ND+fLP pilot, too, sat exclusively within the remit of specialist LPA teams operating in the context of a voluntary programme of lone parent support (New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP)). In extending the eligibility for lone parent measures and support to main claimant parents and their partners, parental issues also became the responsibility of mainstream advisers operating in locally managed teams in the context of mandatory job seeking regimes and programmes. This greatly expanded not only the type, but the also the number, of advisers affected.

This much wider customer reach, involving mainstream advisers as well as LPAs, presented pilot managers with a considerable challenge, since potentially all Jobcentre Plus advisers, as well as other customer facing staff, needed to be informed and up-skilled about the new measures:

‘With this pilot we need to reach everybody in offices because potentially they could all have contact with a customer who may well have a partner who could benefit...that’s the biggest difference., It’s a lot bigger and a lot more complex to get round and let people know what’s going on.’

(Manager)

To manage the complexity of implementing the pilot extension, the clear initial focus was on delivery to partners. Part of the reason was because partners, like lone parents, are more readily identifiable as parents within the Jobcentre Plus labour market system (LMS) than main claimants. Although Lisa Harker’s report recommended the introduction of a ‘front-end marker’ onto LMS to enable staff to identify all parents at the earliest opportunity, at the time of the research, the marker did not appear to include main claimants.²³

Also relevant was an early confusion among some staff that the term ‘couple parent’ only applied to non-claiming partners, and a misunderstanding that main claimant parents were not eligible for the new measures. Both during interviews with pilot staff and Jobcentre Plus staff more generally, discussion of the pilot extension invariably centred on delivery to and impact of the new measures on partners. Indeed, somewhat confusingly, the common shorthand used for couple parent customers was to call them ‘partners.’

²³ Lisa Harker (2006) p18.

2.2 Staffing, management and delivery arrangements

Previous evaluations of ND+fLP noted the pivotal role of pilot managers and CPMs in directing the pilot and ensuring that relevant Jobcentre Plus staff were informed, supported, trained and actively engaged in promoting the new measures to customers.²⁴ Pilot managers were identified from within existing lone parent teams and, as such, also had responsibilities for managing lone parent services and programmes more broadly. CPMs, on the other hand, were recruited, appointed and resourced directly as a result of the introduction of the ND+fLP pilot.

Although pilot staff remained actively involved with lone parent and childcare agendas, reflecting broader organisational change and locally devolved delivery arrangements across Jobcentre Plus, extending the customer reach resulted in a diminution in both of these roles. Decisions about how to inform and engage couple parents were, in both areas, ceded to Advisory Services Managers (ASMs) in local offices whose responsibilities lay with delivering services to main claimant and partner customers, rather than lone parents:

'It's remotely managed now...that's the main difference...we've lost control haven't we?'

(Childcare Partnership Manager)

With no hands-on or management role in determining how, or indeed if, the measures were being promoted to couple parent customers in local Jobcentre Plus offices, pilot managers and CPMs effectively lost control and co-ordination of the pilot:

'Once the pilot team was disbanded locally we lost a lot of control over what was going on, and this is through no fault of local offices, because basically managers have to manage the day to day work...When people come out of being in a ring fenced job, you just use them where you have to.'

(Childcare Partnerships Manager)

By ring fencing the additional resource received and retaining a dedicated pilot staff team, the non-London pilot tried hard to counter this effect:

'Rather than put dedicated resource into a split of sites, we kept the resource as a central team and gave somebody the job of going out and supporting, providing training material...on all the strands of New Deal Plus...We [also] decided to ring fence the additional...resource...so we'd get a better measure of what was effective and what wasn't.'

(Pilot manager)

Ring fencing the resource had also helped to make the extension more 'recession proof,' in this area by ensuring that key staff were not redeployed to other tasks, but continued to work on the pilot as they had done previously:

'I don't think [the recession] has affected [the pilot] because we do ring fence that resource... we have to deliver certain things and...we would make sure we were doing that....The amount of resource that's put onto New Deal Plus, it certainly hasn't deteriorated.'

(Manager)

²⁴ Hosian and Breen (2007) p18.

In this case study area, the original pilot manager continued to oversee the pilot extension, although more pressing priorities, including responsibility for implementing Lone Parent Obligation (LPO) policy and managing new services for lone parents, did limit the amount of time they were able to devote to it. LPAs appointed to work on an outreach basis as part of the original pilot remained in contact with Children's Centres, holding surgeries for parents and conducting presentations and organising events designed to raise awareness of the newly extended measures to potential customers and parent organisations.

The IWC team established to provide administrative back-up to LPAs was also retained, their remit now extended to mainstream advisers supporting main claimant parents. In releasing advisers from the burdensome task of processing IWC paperwork, this use of the extension's administrative resource was identified as a key success of the original pilot.²⁵

The existing CPM focused efforts internally, informing and upskilling Jobcentre Plus staff on parental and childcare related issues, taking responsibility for delivering the 'child details marker'²⁶ and 'childcare discussions' training, while the additional CPM worked externally and more strategically with Local Authority Early Years Teams, Family Information Services, schools and Children's Centres.

To introduce better cohesion for parental matters across the different services, programmes and customer groups, in the non-London case study area, LPAs were given main responsibility for supporting partners, although in some of the larger Jobcentre Plus offices, specialist partner advisers were identified. In smaller Jobcentre Plus offices, generic advisers took on this role.

In contrast, in London, where pilot measures for both lone and couple parents had been rolled out across all districts, the different ND+fLP elements had been subsumed under the umbrella of the 'London Parent Offer,' which aimed to package under a single banner all the help and support available to London-based parents:

'All the elements have now been put into the London Parent Offer...[which] basically has got the IWC, it's got the IWEF, In Work Advisory Support, Childcare Assist, flexible provision, Discovery, so everything the pilot had has now been rolled into this London Parent Offer.'

(Manager)

A separate initiative rather than an exclusive part of the pilot extension, the London Parent Offer was a deliberate attempt to simplify an otherwise confusing array of eligibility criteria, measures and programmes targeted at low income parents living in London:²⁷

'It's so so complicated about what is available for who, and we didn't think it mattered whether it was New Deal Plus or...NDLP...as long as our advisers were quite clear that's available, and that's available, when and for whom...It's gone down really well [because]...when you start talking about different programmes that we've got, it gets really really confusing.'

(Manager)

²⁵ Hosain and Breen (2007) p18.

²⁶ From April 2008, Jobcentre Plus staff are required to capture and regularly review information for all benefit customers about the number and ages of any dependent children, together with any childcare barriers, to help ensure adequate local childcare provision.

²⁷ In London, in addition to DWP programmes, a range of measures and pilots operate to help low income parents to access childcare and work which include the Childcare Affordability Programme Pilot and Child Poverty Pilots.

In the London pilot, additional resources provided for the pilot extension were distributed district wide to lone parent teams based in local Jobcentre Plus offices as part of the wider lone parent offer:

‘When we had it in one part of the district, we had a central team with a [manager], but we took the decision when we expanded it to put it out to site...so the advisory resource is out with the local site managers as part of their lone parent offer, not centrally managed.’

(Manager)

With the pilot team disbanded, staff in London returned to their previous jobs. The former pilot manager resumed her main role supervising the centralised IWC and Return to Work teams. A legacy of the original pilot which the district was keen to retain, the team provided centralised administrative back-up to advisers, processing IWC applications for lone, and new, couple parents.

In both case study areas, individual ASMs located in each Jobcentre Plus office had responsibility for cascading information down to relevant staff and for promoting the measures to couple parents as they deemed appropriate, according to local priorities and delivery arrangements. Consequently, staff formerly involved in the pilot had no control over how the measures were being delivered, and only limited knowledge of how awareness and take up of the measures by main claimants and partners might compare to lone parents. In London, with no one specifically responsible for overseeing or implementing the pilot, the lack of information and feedback was particularly marked:

‘At the moment I’ve got no evidence to give you as to what’s happening...other than you going out to each individual office and asking the people that are dealing with it.’

(Manager)

There was a belief among pilot staff that, with decentralised delivery, key messages about the extension were not being communicated to Jobcentre Plus staff, nor to all parents who might be eligible:

‘When it was just for lone parents we were working as a pilot team...together...Now it’s...been rolled out to all parents...I don’t think the message is getting out there as much as it would have done if it was a centralised team...’

(Manager)

In the London pilot, only the two CPMs remained in post. However, both roles had been broadened in scope and merged with the role of Partnership Manager. Each Partnership Manager was now responsible for coverage of child poverty and worklessness agendas for specific local authority boroughs in the district. As in the non-London pilot, they had taken responsibility for organising information sessions for staff and external partners to promote the importance of identifying childcare barriers for parents with dependent children.

2.3 Targets and monitoring

The apparent absence of any guidelines for monitoring the effectiveness of the original pilots, raised in the first evaluation of ND+fLP,²⁸ was not only surprising to staff, but made the task of gauging their performance and progress all the more difficult. Curiously, More Voluntary Contact (MVC) appeared to be the only element of ND+fLP which the original pilots were specifically targeted to deliver, although no one seemed to know why.

²⁸ Hosain and Breen (2007) p17.

Pilot staff were unclear of whether MVC was still being monitored or whether it applied to the extension. In London, with the disbanding of the outreach team, the assumption was that it was not, whereas in the non-London pilot, where outreach activities continued, staff were unsure. None of the staff in either area were aware of any targets or monitoring requirements, nor of any data specifically being collected for the extension:

'The only management information I've seen is...processing times on IWC, I don't know if I've seen anything else.'

(Manager)

The absence of any specific targets or requirements for monitoring or reporting management information for the extension tended to confirm the belief in London that the pilot was concluded, while in the non-London area, made it virtually impossible for pilot staff to judge how well the extension was operating or how it compared with previous delivery to lone parents. That the pilot extension was launched at the same time as the introduction of LPO had also served to diminish the relative priority of new measures for couple parents.

2.4 Enhanced adviser training

Unlike the original pilot, there was no dedicated training programme or specially developed training modules for extending the measures to couples, nor any requirement on advisers to formally upgrade their skills. How to inform and upskill Jobcentre Plus advisers with limited expertise and experience of supporting parents, therefore, emerged as a clear initial priority.

Using LPAs as 'mentors' and 'buddies' for their less experienced colleagues was seen as a useful way of harnessing their greater expertise and familiarity with the new measures. The approach, pioneered in both areas to support mainstream and generic advisers newly responsible for lone parents claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), was slow to embed and rather ad hoc. The organisational, but also physical, separation of mainstream advisers from LPA teams (with the former usually located on the ground floor of Jobcentre Plus offices and the latter more frequently on upper floors) restricted opportunities for contact and sharing of expertise. Furthermore, while LPAs may have had the necessary skills, like most advisers, they had limited free time and were frequently unavailable to advise colleagues when most pressingly required.

In the non-London pilot, informal support was strongly underpinned by a structured programme of formal presentations and workshops. Designed to upskill mainstream advisers and to enhance awareness and understanding of the measures, the programme was delivered across the district by CPMs and other pilot staff. A high level of awareness was evident among these staff about the extension, the specific measures it comprised and, importantly, which customer groups should be targeted.

Getting to grips with the complexity of eligibility criteria for different parent customers and for the different measures was said to have been especially helpful, particularly for mainstream advisers unaccustomed to dealing with their customers as parents, but also for LPAs whose knowledge of and familiarity with lone parents did not always transfer seamlessly to partners as perhaps anticipated:

'When you've got...couple parents, you got two people and there's different rules as in, you've got to look at both of the benefits. Has one person been claiming for the whole of the year?'

(CETL)

Highlighting that expertise and administrative support was on hand to process IWC applications was an important message the sessions usefully conveyed, and participants felt the exercise had been highly informative. Only certain advisers from a selection of local offices had attended the sessions, however, and with high staff turnover and ongoing recruitment, pilot staff foresaw the need for sessions to be re-run:

'We've had a huge, huge turnover and influx of new staff, and if I'm honest I think there's a lot of work that we now have to do again to make sure that the face-to-face staff have got this information and to make sure we're honouring our part of it.'

(Manager)

Pilot staff acknowledged that messages about the extension of eligibility to all parent customers were mostly reaching LPAs and those advisers dealing with partners; mainstream advisers with responsibility for JSA claimants were generally 'out of the loop' :

'The message...is not getting through to mainstream advisers. It's only the people that are actually doing the...WFI partner interviews that have possibly got some understanding of the things that are available to the customer.'

(Manager)

There was also recognition that all frontline staff, not just advisers, would need to be targeted at some point:

'We still need to continue to build on that and do more work with new claims or with even the FJR teams.'

(Manager)

Changes in delivery arrangements as a result of the imminent roll out of Flexible New Deal (FND) had taken priority in the intervening period, but a forward plan to re-launch ND+fLP was in preparation:

'Because of the change of our delivery methods anyway with Flexible New Deal...there are huge, huge changes in all the sites...we have a forward plan that once FND was embedded...we would plan to do some workshops and themed weeks...to raise awareness.'

(Manager)

In London, understanding of the aims, objectives and specific customer reach of the extension was, in comparison, low, particularly among mainstream advisers and those based in Jobcentre Plus offices in the parts of the district where ND+fLP had been newly rolled out. Former pilot staff acknowledged that training and awareness raising should be taking place, but with no specific responsibility for ensuring this was happening, were not aware of what had been done locally, or how effective it may have been:

'There was supposed to have been enhanced training for the advisers...I'm assuming that did happen but...it needs to be looked at...'

(Manager)

Not unsurprisingly, LPAs had the highest levels of awareness and understanding of the measures being extended to couple parents (and to lone parents in the parts of the district not previously involved in the pilot). However, with locally devolved decision making, only in rare instances did LPAs come into contact with couple parents, whether as partners or main claimants. In London, some LPAs had recently been redeployed to process new JSA claims, but ordinarily they did not deal with main claimants or deliver Work Focused Interviews to partners (WFIPs). As such, while they knew

which measures were available to lone parents, few were aware of what had been extended to couple parents:

'In Work Credit is actually for the lone parent who goes back to work...I think it applies to the parents (sic) now...but I'm not sure where that fits in, because that's not my remit, because I'm more the lone parent side.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

As elsewhere, mainstream and generic advisers, who routinely engaged with main claimant parents and sometimes partners, generally had limited knowledge and awareness:

'The Lone Parent Advisers know, certainly, but...the other advisers probably aren't as up to date as they should be on it. So that's something that we're going to have to work on with them.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Even when staff were aware of the new measures, a common assumption was that eligibility had only been extended to the partners of benefit claimants, not to the main claimant. Low levels of awareness in London thus reflected local delivery arrangements but also a less systematic approach to upskilling advisers. With the reach of the pilot so widely extended, former pilot staff had no control, nor any information or feedback, about what messages were being conveyed or how effectively they were communicated

'I don't know what message went out about the extension of the pilot....District office...had the remit of what they should be delivering but what they've done with that information, how it's gone out to the advisers...I've got no way of knowing...I can send [information] out to the managers, but then how do we know that that message is getting passed on to the advisers that need it?'

(Manager)

'It's a cascade thing really...from [District] to the operating manager to the adviser managers, to their advisers and they should be sitting down with them and going through it. Whether they do or not, I don't know.'

(Manager)

ASMs and advisers confirmed that information about the extended reach of the measures was 'cascaded' from a variety of sources and using different methods – mostly email, general office meetings and occasional written communications. Details of the LPO, including a desktop aid, were circulated to all advisers electronically, together with instructions for accessing intranet information and advice about parent related issues.

In the high pressure environment of local Jobcentre Plus offices, unsolicited methods such as these appeared to be largely ineffective. Few mainstream advisers felt they had sufficient time to read emails and documentation which fell within their own area of responsibility, let alone subjects they believed lay outside their remit:

'Sometimes if it's an e-mail attachment...or a hard copy...when do you find time to...digest it or grasp it or have a clearer understanding of the contents of it...you just in the end say right OK that's a lone parent [issue], I'm not going to think about that.'

(Mainstream adviser)

'You might get 50 e-mails a week and if you're constantly booking or covering people who are not here or doing another job role, you do not get enough time to read them.'

(Mainstream adviser)

Some admitted that emails with parent-related content would typically remain unopened, or even deleted before they were read:

'I think sometimes the problem is you have so much...you've got NDLP, ND25+, ND50+, NDP, the Flexible New Deal, you kind of get inundated...you'll get e-mails sent through and...you start reading and the first little bit doesn't seem to indicate that it's anything to do with your team so you'll get rid, because you've got so much to look at, you'll think.. OK that's not my team..... I'll get rid.'

(Mainstream adviser)

Intranet help was said to be difficult to locate and the website complicated to navigate. Even LPAs struggled to update their knowledge due to constantly changing locations for retrieving information electronically:

'The most confusing thing is looking at the NDLP guide; have you tried to get in there?...How are you going to find time to go through and look when you've got to give the customer an answer... You have to go through so many gateways to get to what you're actually looking for.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

The frenetic pace and prescribed methods of mainstream operations – processing new claims, fortnightly job reviews and regular mandatory interventions – together with the possibility that advisory staff could be taken off advisory tasks to process new claims, undertake administrative and other duties, or work on reception, to cover for staff sickness or shortages – was neither amenable to studied consideration of the new guidance, nor conducive to a more customised, client-focused service:

'A lot of it is 'here's a document, read that, that's your training' or 'go onto the internet'...oh and 'can you just sign this customer?' 'Well I can't .. I'm trying to do desk training!'

(Mainstream adviser)

While the economic downturn had clearly intensified operational pressures, the working conditions and practices of mainstream advisers were said to be ordinarily quite different to those of LPAs:

'When you're downstairs...it's buzzing and you've got kind of things in your face all the time...any of the advising jobs down there is...much more frantic...up here it's just calmer...You have the facility up here to talk.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

With training for new policies and programmes coming on stream for what many Mainstream advisers saw as 'their own customers,' few believed that more training for initiatives considered peripheral to their main role, was the answer:

'You hear all these terms but...you're already bombarded with a lot of information and literature which you need for your own role.'

(Mainstream adviser)

It was conceded by former pilot staff that if information about ND+fLP, IWC and other parent specific measures was not being communicated to or taken on board by Mainstream advisers, then messages were unlikely to be getting through to main claimant customers and their partners.

'[It's possible] there are customers out there that are not getting the service...that they should be entitled to. They may not be being informed.'

(Manager)

'In order to encourage somebody to do something...you've got to be sold on it yourself...they need to be able to promote it and they've not really got much in the way of information to do that.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

2.5 Marketing package

In previous evaluations of ND+fLP, glossy, professionally designed 'chocolate box' leaflets were found to be popular among staff and lone parent customers, although views on the effectiveness of the materials were mixed.²⁹ For example, some staff felt the contents oversold the package of help, raising expectations of customers' entitlements when they were not (yet) eligible for many of the measures described. Staff involved in the extension liked and wanted to continue using the chocolate box leaflet, but supplies had been depleted. Aimed at lone parents, the leaflet was now assumed to be obsolete, although in both case study areas some LPAs continued to use monochrome duplicates with their lone parent customers.

There was some misunderstanding about the availability of marketing materials for couple parents (chiefly understood as partners) which advisers had expected to be sent from head office, as in the original pilot. Some said they had ordered and re-ordered marketing materials, but nothing had materialised:

'Marketing materials, I need some...We keep ordering it and it's not coming...There's loads of stuff I've ordered...and it's just not coming through... They're provided by head office aren't they?'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Short booklets and leaflets with simple messages and contact details were felt to be more useful than comprehensive guides outlining the different measures customers may be entitled to at different stages of the claim. Advisers said they would have liked to have a leaflet they could hand out to partners attending one off Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) who were not yet interested in work:

'If you're seeing somebody for a one off interview and they're not interested, it's good to give them a bit of a booklet...OK well have a read and if at any point you're interested [get in touch], but if you haven't got the literature!'

(Lone Parent adviser)

²⁹ Hosain and Breen (2007) p37; Jenkins (2008) p29.

Additional marketing resources were spent producing materials to be used externally with partners and customers in community settings. Leaflets and postcards informing parents about IWC and advising them not to start work without first contacting their adviser, had been distributed to outreach venues across the area. Coded to indicate the source location, the intention was to monitor their effectiveness in different settings and with different categories of parent customer. Display materials had also been produced for use by outreach staff and CPMs working in schools, community centres and at events such as jobs fairs. A freephone number was widely advertised on all materials. A programme of events using these materials was planned, but not yet delivered at the time of the research.

In London, resources provided for the extension had been used centrally to promote a series of joint community events across the district targeted at low income families. A single page flyer promoting IWC was also planned, but at the time of the fieldwork, there were no specific marketing materials available in connection with the extension of measures to couple parents:

'I'm not aware of any marketing...there may be some available but I'm not aware of any.... I'm pretty confident that apart from the LPAs, they're probably not giving out any written information about the incentives that are available.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

With the marketing resource held at district, and other pressing priorities to deal with, adviser managers felt that the time involved in commissioning marketing materials was not really worth the effort:

'We can go to marketing if we want a leaflet of some sort drawn up, but it is quite a time consuming process and truthfully, I would probably get somebody to draw it up and copy it myself...It's great to get funding and it's great to get money, but if it's a smallish pot of money and it goes into district, you're never going to see it.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Here too it was conceded that, with so many new policies and services coming on stream, and with rising registers of new claimants, couple parent policies and measures had taken 'a back seat.' The main driver of behaviours, reflected in the targets and performance measures both for the district and of individual staff, was helping key priority groups – principally new claimants, lone parents and unemployed jobseekers – back to work.

'With any of our customers...everything is high priority in terms of moving any benefit recipient towards the labour market, into work or into training.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

2.6 Summary

- In extending the eligibility for lone parent support and measures to main claimant parents and their partners, parental issues also became the responsibility of mainstream advisers operating in locally managed teams in the context of mandatory jobseeking regimes.
- Due to decentralised delivery arrangements and a much wider customer reach, in both areas, extending ND+fLP and IWC to couple parents has resulted in a diminution in the profile of the pilot and of the role of pilot managers.

- In the London pilot, the different ND+fLP elements had been subsumed under the umbrella of the LPO, the pilot team was disbanded and additional resources provided for the pilot extension distributed to local Jobcentre Plus offices as part of the wider lone parent offer.
- In the non-London pilot, the additional resource was ring fenced, enabling the retention of the original pilot team, although responsibility for LPO and associated services limited the amount of time the pilot manager could devote to the extension.
- There was no dedicated training programme or training modules developed for raising awareness of the extended pilot measures or for up-skilling staff about couple parent issues.
- In both areas, ASMs based in local Jobcentre Plus offices had responsibility for cascading information down to relevant staff and for ensuring promotion of the measures to main claimants and partners according to local priorities and delivery arrangements.
- In both pilot areas, Mainstream advisers who engaged with main claimant parents and sometimes partners, had low levels of awareness and understanding of the extension of ND+fLP and IWC to couple parents, and limited engagement with parental issues more generally. Low awareness was especially marked among Mainstream advisers in the London pilot.
- LPA had much higher levels of awareness and understanding of the extension of ND+fLP and IWC to couple parents, but in the London pilot they had no role in supporting main claimants or partners. In the non-London pilot, LPAs had main responsibility for supporting partner parents, but no role in supporting main claimant parents.
- In both areas, with so many new policies and services coming on stream, and with rising registers of new claimants, couple parent policies and measures had taken 'a back seat.'
- There was a belief among pilot staff that if information about the extension of the pilot to couple parents was not being effectively communicated to Jobcentre Plus staff, key messages were unlikely to be reaching all parents who might be eligible for the measures.

3 Pilot delivery to main claimants

This chapter examines delivery arrangements for informing main claimant parents about the specific measures they may be entitled to, examining how well these customers are being engaged and supported as parents within Jobcentre Plus. It draws on interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and main claimant customers both in London and outside London.

3.1 Identifying main claimant parents

In order to engage and support main claimants who are parents, staff must first be able to identify them as such. As noted previously, the specific Harker recommendation for the introduction of a ‘front-end marker’ to enable staff to identify all parents did not appear to have been implemented at the time of the research. Staff were not aware of a generic ‘parent’ marker and, compared with lone parents, main claimants who were parents were considered difficult to identify:

‘I don’t think [couple parents] are...as easily identifiable as the tick for the lone parents.’

(Manager)

‘It’s actually quite difficult to identify the customer as a parent.’

(Manger)

The child details marker, which appeared to serve as a proxy for parenthood, was not always found to be completed accurately:

‘It’s perfectly straightforward and easy to [identify lone parents] but it isn’t for partners...it’s not clear that this is a parent...you would have to look in the [child details] marker...but...that’s only as accurate as whoever’s fed the information in.’

(Advisory Services Manager)

The fact that populating the marker, together with all matters relating to children and childcare, was considered to fall within the remit of LPAs, was one view for why the marker might not be being completed fully or accurately:

‘The [child details] marker is on...LMS and...there was a lot of work done on working, recognising the marker, how to populate it...It was very much seen as ‘well we don’t need to do that...that’s just for lone parents, oh it’s only the lone parent team.’

(Manager)

The tendency to reduce parental issues to matters of childcare reflected a wider difficulty mainstream advisers, in particular, had in viewing their customers as parents:

‘If you’re asking somebody on frontline to identify a parent, they would always think of lone parents. If they got a customer in front of them and they say I’ve got children, and they want help, they’ll ring us, the lone parent team but they’re not always lone parents. They just hear the word children and they assume they are lone parents.’

(Lone Parent adviser)

Populating the marker was thus commonly viewed by them as a one-off administrative exercise which represented the start and finish of their obligations towards claiming parents. Many advisers wanted to be able to focus on their core role and responsibilities against which their own performance was measured – getting unemployed job seekers back to work as swiftly as possible. Judged in this way, parental issues were generally seen by these staff as peripheral to the main task of moving customers into work.

3.2 Greater flexibility towards parent customers

To support the Government's objectives on child poverty, new flexibilities for parents claiming Jobseeker's Allowance allow Jobcentre Plus staff greater discretion in the application of signing on, jobseeking and hardship regimes. The aim is to ensure that regimes are appropriate for parents on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and that customers have a reasonable chance to show good cause for non-attendance prior to the application of disallowances and sanctions. The flexibilities are also designed to make jobsearch help more 'family focused' by making it easier for parents to fit jobsearch activities and work around caring responsibilities and family life generally.

As part of the introduction of new flexibilities, in both case study areas, efforts had been made to separate parents signing on for JSA from claimants without dependent children. In London, for example, colour coded rubber bands were used to indicate to staff conducting fortnightly job reviews (FJR) that the claimant signing on for benefits was a parent, enabling greater discretion and flexibility to be exercised. There was no evidence either from observations or interviews, however, that these new arrangements had been extended to main claimant parents. Observations of customers signing on under the new regime failed to identify a single couple parent, only lone parents. In explanation, one Advisory Services Manager (ASM) stated that main claimant parents would not be offered the flexibilities routinely, as lone parents would be, but only if a problem was raised by the customer:

'For a lone parent...they would have to make consideration to the enhanced JSA service that they should get, that they can be allowed to not sign for certain periods of time, that they can be allowed to restrict their hours. Realistically, I think that if it was a couple parent, the adviser would wait for the parent to raise an issue before considering those enhancements. It's not something that we're going to advertise.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Main claimant parents who were subsequently interviewed reported that signing on arrangements and FJR followed a strict set of procedures in which their status as parents, if raised at all, was only discussed in the context of confirming the number and ages of any children. Some JSA main claimants had been allocated signing on times which clashed with taking or collecting children from school. One parent who requested to change his signing on time was given short shrift:

'They've given me a stupid time, twenty to four I have to sign....I said 'well why that [time]?', because of the kids like, and they said well 'that means you ain't available for work.'...A chap I know who ain't got no kids, he signs on at nine o'clock in the morning, but the bloke with three kids has to sign on at twenty to four!'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Another claimant was obliged to take his young children with him to sign when his partner was attending a training course to become a teaching assistant, only to be chastised by Jobcentre Plus staff. He felt particularly aggrieved because the course had been suggested by an adviser when his partner recently attended Jobcentre Plus for a mandatory WFIP:

'They moaned one day when I had to take [the children] all down with me, because I had nobody to have them...I had to take them with me to sign on. They said 'this ain't a place for children.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

A small number of main claimant parents also reported they had been sanctioned for signing on late or failing to attend an appointment resulting in their benefits being reduced or stopped for a short period. Some, though not all, gave reasons connected with children, for example a child's illness or difficulties with childcare arrangements. A few had been required to re-start their claim resulting not only in the loss of JSA, but of other benefits conditional upon JSA receipt, such as Housing and Council Tax Benefit.

Having a partner appeared to be viewed by some fortnightly signing staff as a reason why greater flexibility and discretion should not be extended to the claimant. This seemed to be the case regardless of whether the main claimant was male or female, or which parent had the main responsibility for looking after the children:

'... I was like well my daughter's ill and...they was like 'well you've got a partner so you should have made it into the interview all the same ...'

(JSA main claimant, female)

No allowance was apparently made for the fact that the partner was not the child's father, and had only recently set up home with the mother, following his release from a three year prison sentence. Advisers, who knew their customers better, were often aware that male partners were not necessarily the father of the child or children, and relationships between the mother and partner not always long established or stable, but they had limited contact or no influence over FJR staff regarding the treatment of individual customers.

For some parents, being sanctioned or having to restart their claim had resulted in or compounded financial difficulties and hardship, including the build up of rent and mortgage arrears and general household debt.

'I didn't turn up for an interview, but I didn't know anything about it. Now a few months down the line...I'm getting a bill for £300...for rent arrears.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Other claiming parents had been threatened with sanctions for losing documents or arriving late for an appointment. Such threats, though rarely carried out in practice, served to generate bad feeling and compromised the building of rapport between main claimants and their advisers.

Those claiming benefits for the first time and actively engaged in job search felt especially aggrieved, but few complained for fear of losing benefits:

'I've forgot my job sheet before, well I lost it actually, and...I got...a rollicking...and that's the first time I never filled it in because I don't want it to affect my benefits...I don't want to rock the boat...it just really gets to you sometimes...but you have to bite your tongue.'

(JSA claimant, male)

'When I forgot my job sheet he was moaning saying oh this could affect your benefit,...they talk to you like you're another one of these that never wanted to work...but it's not, I've just hit bad times...but you can't say nothing because you're scared...in case...your benefit stops.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Other claimants reported more favourable experiences of signing on. However, examples given of flexibility having been exercised were generally unconnected with being a parent.

3.3 Jobcentre Plus advice and support

Short, routinised or otherwise unsatisfactory meetings in which parental matters rarely figured, strongly featured in the testimonies of main claimants attending Jobcentre Plus fortnightly to sign on, as well as those attending mandatory meetings. In both case study areas, the limited amount of time advisers had and the lack of staff continuity were common criticisms, particularly among customers living in London:

'I've only had two interviews with regards to work and...I saw two different advisers.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

In the non-London pilot, advisers generally had more time to spend with customers, although some advisers were said to be more helpful than others:

'There was one adviser...she was great...she went all out [to] help me...she...pulled the strings so I could have the course...she was really good. And when I went in the next time I had a different adviser and I was a bit peeved with that because she'd helped me so much and this one was like four minutes ...'

(JSA main claimant, male)

The help on offer was also felt by some claimants to be inadequate or inappropriate to their level of skills and qualifications. Tests to assess basic skills, for example, were believed by some to be indiscriminate and unnecessary, given their backgrounds and work experience:

'When I go to a meeting and they want me to fill in an application just to show that I can fill one in...it's a bit degrading.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

A common complaint was to bemoan the lack of training opportunities which would enable customers to gain qualifications and secure better paid work:

'When I asked for leaflets about different training courses or options that would be available there was very little. The woman didn't really seem able to give me very much.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Some parents with high level skills and qualifications felt that Jobcentre Plus help was mostly geared towards those with lower level skills, but considered themselves to be more than capable of looking for work unassisted:

'Jobcentres are not really aiming at the professional classes...they're really quite capable of going out and looking for their own jobs. It's just a question of whether the jobs are there or not and...the Jobcentre can't help with that.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Citing the impact of the economic downturn in reducing job vacancies, some customers were sympathetic to the difficulties faced by Jobcentre Plus in the current climate:

'The jobs aren't there, so no amount of advice or personal tailoring...is really going to alter the fact that rents have run so far ahead of wages for most of the basic jobs that are now available, that for most people they're going to be working...not for any substantial material improvement.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'You know they do try their best, I think it's just the way the situation is at the moment.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Noticeably absent from the reported experiences of main claimants was a couple or family perspective in the help provided. Advisers seemed to focus exclusively on the individual claimant, seemingly unaware of, or oblivious to, the presence of a non-working partner and children in the household, or of the implications this might have on job seeking behaviour or the type of support needed. Help geared specifically to the needs and circumstances of claimants as parents, was said to be in short supply:

'I wouldn't say I've had really a huge amount of advice full stop, but certainly not geared to parents.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'It's definitely not focused on parents at all...it's just the individual, they just look at me, they forget actually that I've even got children.'

(JSA main claimant, female)

Advisers generally seemed unsure of how they could or should tailor the advice and help on offer. Parental issues, if mentioned at all, generally concerned childcare which relatively few main claimants said they had any need for or interest in. When specifically asked, however, being treated as a couple with children was something many claiming parents could see the benefits of, and expressed interest in:

'To look at the whole picture, that you are a family and...it's not just about you as an individual, it's a family's needs. But...it's never really been seen like that, it's just like well you're the one that signs on so you're the one we deal with and it's...kind of kept in that box as it were.'

(JSA main claimant, female)

Some parent customers had received help as a couple from local support agencies. Being treated together, these forms of help were believed to be more personal and family focused than Jobcentre Plus support:

'We're both signed up to something called Families into Work and we have somebody else who you know helps us with work. She e-mails us jobs...You get a lot more one to one...I'd never get that kind of help at the Jobcentre, like 15 minutes if you're lucky, and just skimming over the top of things.'

(JSA partner, female)

One key difference in the support provided by locally-based organisations was said to be in accommodating the job aspirations of participating parents for stable and adequately remunerated employment. This approach stood in marked contrast to many claimants' reported experiences of Jobcentre Plus.

'I feel that the Jobcentre sometimes just want to push you into any job. [whereas] the resource centre really do try and help you find what you want.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

3.4 Jobsearch

Claiming parents often expressed strong reticence about moving into work which was temporary, insecure or low paid. A major concern was what would happen if their job did not sustain longer term, trapping them, as they saw it, in low paid work which was insufficient to cover the family's housing costs and living expenses:

'Whatever job I choose...I'd want it to be a long term job...I mean the salary has to be decent...to cover the mortgage and food costs and energy costs and everything else...but...if the job didn't have any prospects of...the salary improving... if that's just a stop gap to keep you in a poorly paid job...that wouldn't be good for me.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Some had previously accepted agency work which failed to live up to the promise of a permanent position, and were reluctant to do so again:

'I worked for...an agency, promised to take me on... and then they spent over budget and .. there was no job. Unfortunately I ain't prepared [to do this now], I said to the Jobcentre... I want a proper job. Agency work a day here, day there, you can't do that, not with family and children.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

The desire for secure and reasonably well paid work appeared to run counter to much of the advice and persuasive techniques used by advisers, based on the notion that any job is better than no job:

'They've got jobs in a supermarket and I tell them that's...OK but it's like minimum wage...I've tried to explain to the Jobcentre but they won't have it. It's like 'well it's better than what you've got now.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

FJR staff, in particular, were said to be mostly unsympathetic to the aspirations of claiming parents in terms of finding work that paid a wage sufficient to support a non-working partner and children:

'I'm on the internet every day...and I've sent through that many CVs, I've been to job fairs everything...I tried to explain I don't like being in this situation...I'd rather have a job but I ain't going to work for minimum wage because I know I'm not going to be able to pay my bills...but they ain't that interested ...'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Whether they rented or owned their own home, many claimants felt that one parent as a single earner in a low or minimum wage job would be insufficient to support a home and family. Either one main earner would require a family wage or both parents would need to work. The responsibilities and financial outgoings that parents had to meet were said to be more onerous than those of a young single person living at home, which many of the Jobcentre Plus vacancies were better suited to, some believed:

'I try to tell them that I can't run a house, bills and mortgage and everything on a minimum wage...I'd rather like try to ride it out a bit and see if anything comes up with better money, because...it's alright if you're a kid and you're on minimum wage because you ain't got a house, if [you've got responsibilities] it don't stretch that far.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

A specific concern was the effect on benefits and household income of only one parent moving into work:

'[If only one parent found work] the JSA would probably just stop, so that would be a major impact on our financial situation. Of course the Council Tax Benefit would probably stop as well, Housing Benefit.. [it would] put us back into a really bad situation.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

The claimant's partner moving into work first, or one parent working part-time, was considered equally unviable because take home pay was generally little more than benefits and insufficient to support the household as a whole:

'... but obviously when I get a job [she] wants to get...a part time job...but she wants to wait.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

During her face-to-face interview, one main claimant parent was thrilled to receive notification of being shortlisted for a well paid part-time job in her chosen field, after more than two years absence from work. Her delight was short lived following the realisation, as she saw it, that if she attended the interview and was offered the job, she would be unable to accept. The family, she explained, would be unable to manage on her part-time wages alone:

'The issue...if I were to get that job and then [my partner is] still not working then...we wouldn't be in a position to be able to just be on a part time wage, lose benefits and be on a part time wage.'

(JSA main claimant, female)

Some home owning couples were concerned about what the impact on mortgage protection cover would be if only the partner moved into work:

'We don't know how it would affect the mortgage cover if [my partner] got a job....You don't know what to do for the best...you don't want to rock the boat ...'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Certain categories of couple parent including homeowners, those with a large mortgage, and those with high private sector rents, often felt that both parents would need to work full time if they were to cover their housing costs. Others were willing to accept a lower household income from only one working parent before jeopardising, as they saw it, the well-being of the children:

'The child's welfare would always have to come first before we [both] looked at employment on a full time basis.'

(JSA main claimant, female)

Claimants who were newly unemployed and those with mortgages or high rent costs, felt particularly aggrieved that their aspirations for secure work which paid a decent wage were often considered unreasonable by Jobcentre Plus staff:

'Perhaps if they listened a bit more...they want to get their point across but you try and get yours across and it's just like they brush it off, and you try to explain to them that you know if I take this job it's...going to put me behind in my payments...But they don't seem to be bothered, they just turn round and say it's better than what you're getting now on the dole.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Many resented the implication that they did not want a job or were 'work-shy' and simply wanted a sympathetic hearing regarding their desire for secure or reasonably paid work:

'I want a job that's secure because...I don't want to get six months down the line and them say oh you've lost your job...then I don't know if I can claim my mortgage cover again...That's what I've tried to explain to the Jobcentre but they won't have it,. It's like 'well it's better than what you've got now' and I'm trying to say 'it's not because if I take a job and it's rubbish pay and I lose my mortgage cover...I'll be giving you [the] keys...to my house.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Better Off Calculations (BOCs), when they had been done, usually assumed a single earner and most were said to be insufficiently detailed for the couple to be able to make informed decisions about whether one or both parents should move into work:

'When you're at work you...pay for everything, then when you're on the dole you think well...if I come off the dole...am I going to lose this? You never actually know what you're going to lose or what you're going to gain. But I'd like [a BOC] to see where I stand.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'There should be more explained...given a bit more detail...like you've got this, you've got that...you can have this as well. And then say well you're entitled to this...it would be better.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

In the absence of detailed information and advice, parents calculated the difference between in work and out of work income largely on the basis of prior earnings and previous experience of eligibility for, and receipt of, in work benefits such as Working Tax Credit (WTC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). Couples were, therefore, often making important decisions about transitions to work using frequently ill-informed assessments about what benefits and help they might be entitled to in work:

'I've had a low paid job before...I know that with Tax Credits on top...I was struggling...I need a job that's at least £260 a week take home for it to be worth my while...'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'What [my partner] would get paid doing part time [work]...you'd only be replacing the money that we get from Child Tax Credit, so ...it don't really work out.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'I know people that work 16 hours and when they pick their wages up...they've got nothing left, so they're basically working for nothing...If you're going to work, it's best to work full time...when I worked [full time] before...I was a lot better off.'

(JSA main claimant, female)

3.5 Summary

- Mainstream advisers had low levels of awareness and understanding about the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) and In Work Credit (IWC) to couple parents and many struggled to engage their JSA customers as parents.
- Parental issues were seen by Mainstream advisers as frequently peripheral to the main task of moving their customers into work, against which their performance was measured.
- Populating the child details marker was commonly viewed by Mainstream advisers as a one-off administrative exercise which represented the start and finish of their obligations towards claiming parents.
- There was no evidence from observations or customer interviews that new flexibilities introduced as part of Lone Parent Obligation (LPO) had been extended to main claimant parents.
- Short and routinised meetings in which parental matters rarely figured, strongly featured in the testimonies of main claimant parents, particularly those living in London.
- Advisers were said to focus exclusively on the individual claimant, seemingly unaware of, or oblivious to, the presence of a non-working partner in the household or of the implications this might have on jobseeking or the type of support needed.
- Many claimants felt that one parent as a single earner in a low wage job would be insufficient to support a home and family; either one main earner would require a family wage or both parents would need to work.
- Certain categories of couple parent, including homeowners, those with a large mortgage and those with high private sector rents, often felt that both parents would need to work full time if they were to cover their housing costs.
- Couples were often making important decisions about transitions to work using frequently ill-informed assessments about what benefits and help they might be entitled to.

4 Pilot delivery to partners

This chapter examines delivery arrangements for informing the non-claiming partners of main claimants about the specific measures and help they may be entitled to, examining how well these customers are being engaged and supported as parents within Jobcentre Plus. It draws on interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff and partners of main claimants in case study areas in London and outside of London.

4.1 Delivery of Work Focused Interviews for Partners

Excluding any outreach work, the main delivery vehicles for engaging and supporting non-claiming partners are mandatory Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) and the New Deal for Partners (NDP), which operate independently of interventions and support for the claiming parent. One-off WFIPs approximately six months after the claim has been live apply to the partners of Incapacity Benefit (IB), Income Support (IS) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants. The partners of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants must attend WFIPs every six months for as long as the claim is live. Partners can voluntarily join the NDP to access help from a Jobcentre Plus adviser and if they wish to benefit from any of the extended New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) measures.

Given the increased frequency of contact it encouraged between advisers and the partners of JSA claimants, staff in the non-London pilot saw the introduction of six-monthly WFIPs in April 2008 as an opportunity for promoting the ND+fLP extension:

'We looked how we could build on, these six monthly mandatory interviews...[that] had not been done before. They were for a target audience that New Deal Plus wanted to engage with, so we thought that was an easier thing to...build up...using that as a starting point because I think the potential target audience [for couple parents] was so big.'

(Manager)

Which team or teams should deliver six-monthly WFIPs for JSA partners was an early stumbling block in this area; no-one really wanted responsibility for delivering them. In the non-London pilot area, Lone Parent Advisers (LPAs) were given prime responsibility for delivering WFIPs, but not all of them felt equipped to undertake this task. Some LPAs believed partners faced a different set of barriers to lone parents, and did not feel they had the time or expertise to deal with them:

'Lone Parent advisers say "why do they always want to put partners with us?" We're dealing with lone parents who have got very different issues from the partners.'

(Manager)

Others were using the same measures and techniques of persuasion as they did with lone parents, but often with limited success:

'With the JSA [partners]...because we are Lone Parent Advisers doing the job we are starting to say the same thing, if you find a job and it's these hours, particular hours, don't start work without getting in touch, one, we can do calculations and two, there are the incentives.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

The decentralised delivery of WFIPs in which responsibility for deploying staff and allocating adviser time was devolved to local Advisory Services Managers (ASMs), was found to be unhelpful and the process of booking partner appointments slow and uncoordinated:

'When WFI Partners was being introduced...there was hardly any co-operation between the offices...in getting the adviser slots available...I had a list of appointments to book but no one to book them to, because the Manager in that office still hadn't set up the diary.'

(CETL)

In the non-London pilot, where ASMs had been given three years to tackle the stock of JSA partners, partners in general and WFIP delivery in particular, was considered low priority, especially when compared with the introduction of new obligations and services for lone parents:

'We had three years to get this list of people seen...because it was only 6 months into that three years, it wasn't treated as important.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Nevertheless, the low priority afforded to partners was said by pilot staff to be historical, rather than a product of the economic downturn, a view supported by previous evaluations of WFIPs:³⁰

'When it comes to partners, historically...it's always been the case where partners have been put towards the bottom of the list. Lone parents have always been given priority.'

(DASO)

In the London pilot, the low priority of partners was even more marked. Here, responsibility for conducting six-monthly WFIPs fell to Mainstream advisers. Whether due to rising JSA registers, resourcing difficulties or other local priorities, at the time of the research, in several Jobcentre Plus offices WFIPs were not being conducted at all. Elsewhere in the District they were being delivered in an ad hoc, somewhat hurried fashion.

'They should be delivering [WFIPs] but...it's not something...that's top of our agenda at the minute to be honest.'

(Manager)

Mainstream advisers mostly viewed WFIPs as a distraction from their main role, and partners as a group set apart from their mandatory customers. Some would have liked to have offered a more flexible, family focused service but felt constrained by operational pressures, restrictions on time and lack of expertise.

The more experienced staff contrasted the current structure of generic support with advisers operating across different programmes and customer groups, to previous arrangements when advisers had continuity of contact with caseloaded customers over a period of time:

'... from the time that they had their new claim...each time they saw an Adviser, it was somebody from within a very small number of people. So you got to know the customer... supported that person through, rather than be passed from one team for one function...to another...It was a way of keeping continuity...and providing a support mechanism for that customer from the time they came in, to...going into work.'

(Manager)

³⁰ Previous evaluations of WFIPs and the New Deal for Partners (Griffiths, R. and Thomas, A.) in 2001 and 2004 have noted the low priority afforded to WFIPs and NDP.

There was some expectation among ASMs that with the introduction of Flexible New Deal (FND) might come the opportunity for a more appropriate structure for supporting couple parents. Proposals to re-introduce ‘cradle to grave’ support arrangements and ‘day one’ customer caseloading, for example, were seen to offer a better prospect of help tailored to the needs of couple parents. However, staff acknowledged that if main claimants and partners were supported by different advisers working in different teams, opportunities for the emergence of a couple or family perspective would remain limited, even after re-organisation.

4.2 Partner experiences of WFIPs

Reflecting the different practices and expertise of advisers, partners reported mixed experiences of WFIPs and of the support offered to them as parents. In the main, partners in the non-London area said they had received longer, more useful meetings, while those in London mostly found the WFIP to have been short and somewhat perfunctory. Evidence from the observations of adviser interviews supported these findings, indicating that the length, content and coverage of the WFI depended on the area, but also the adviser type. In the London pilot where WFIPs were delivered by mainstream and generic advisers, the average length of a WFIP was recorded as around ten minutes. This compared with around 40 minutes observed in the non-London pilot, where WFIPs were mainly delivered by LPAs.

The extent to which partners had been told, or recalled being told, about ND+fLP, In Work Credit (IWC) and other parent specific measures was also affected by location and adviser type. Non-London partners were more likely to have heard of the measures than those in London, although awareness was low across both areas.

Regardless of the length of the WFIP or the adviser type, partners in both areas confirmed they had been questioned about the number and ages of their children and whether or not they were interested in work:

‘They said it was a compulsory interview that I had to attend...They asked me if I’d ever worked before, my age, if I had any children, what kind of work I’m looking for.’

(JSA partner, female)

Those who had no interest in work, including the majority of partners of IB and IS claimants, partners claiming benefits in their own right (for example Carers Allowance or Disability Living Allowance), and partners who wanted to stay home to care for children full time, were often relieved to be told they were not required to look for work, as some had assumed they would be on receiving the WFIP appointment letter:

‘I was shocked when I got [the letter] really because I said to my husband...’what’s this all in aid of because I’m not allowed to work...so why are they sending me something about the Jobcentre?’

(IS partner, female)

This partner, who had not worked since starting a family thirty years ago, had her meeting curtailed when she disclosed she was in receipt of Carer’s Allowance for a disabled husband. Other partners were claiming disability benefits in their own right and, on contacting Jobcentre Plus, had had their WFIP waived:

'I had a letter...they wanted me up the Jobcentre...I told them I was on DLA and they said you won't have to come then...they was good, and he understood, the man did, how I was...and he says 'well if you can't make it next time we'll come to your house, instead of you coming up because of your legs.'

(JSA partner, female)

Partners who expressed no interest in work, and those with poor English language skills, had WFIPs that were particularly short and perfunctory, especially in London. Observations of WFIPs confirmed that London partners with little or no English, and no apparent interest in work, would often be dealt with in under ten minutes.

It was not uncommon for partners of JSA claimants to assume that looking for work was mandatory. Some were, therefore, surprised and puzzled to be told by their adviser that it was not:

'They said that...I didn't have to look for a job if I didn't want to...Well I've been looking for jobs anyway but...I was quite surprised...because if it's a compulsory interview...and they're going to interview you about looking for work and what kind of work I'm looking for, then surely I should be looking for work?'

(JSA partner, female)

Partners who were actively jobseeking at the time of their WFIP were offended by the assumption implicit in the approach; that they did not want to work:

'The girl that actually interviewed me, she says to me 'what type of work have you done before?' Then she said 'have you actually worked before?' I said 'well I'm nearly 30 years old, of course I've worked before!' I was actually older than the girl I think who was interviewing me and I found it quite patronising, you know, I haven't spent my life on benefits ...'

(JSA partner, female)

In the London pilot where WFIPs were being delivered by Mainstream advisers, the sense of being routinely processed for help in the shortest possible time, was particularly strongly expressed. The advice and support on offer was often felt to be rushed and cursory, with customers mostly left to their own devices to search for jobs:

'She said she was going to do a job search for me...on line, I told her either admin or retail and then she typed in all the stuff. She didn't ask me whether I wanted full time or part time and then she said 'oh there's nothing there,' and that was it...it was that 'well if you want it you can go down and look at it yourself'...I just kind of left it at that.'

(JSA partner, female)

A Polish woman with two school aged children was interested in part-time supermarket work. Though her spoken English was good, she struggled with reading and writing it. She had attended two WFIPs six months apart, but little appeared to have been offered to her in the way of advice and practical assistance:

'It's like are you looking for the job? How [many] kids do you have? How old? And that's it...I [need to] know more information because if I like to go, for example, go to the shop, Tesco or something, I don't know where to go you know, I need to go there and what? Which qualification I need to have? And...I think I need to do the better writing and reading.'

(JSA partner, female)

Though the physical environment was said to be much improved compared with the past, some partners found Jobcentre Plus offices noisy and intimidating, particularly the ground floor, and not especially child friendly:

'It's done out better now than it used to be...but I don't think it's a nice place to have to go truthfully you know!'

(IB partner, female)

'Going up the Jobcentre, it's not a nice place to be when there's security guards there and there's people with cans of lager ...'

(IB partner, female)

For others, the environment was less problematic than was the lack of one to one advice or personalised support:

'You don't actually get any advice, like one on one, we offer you this...Just a proper interview or a discussion of what they can offer...you don't get any of that, so I don't see any point'

(JSA partner, female)

Partners who had previously claimed benefits in their own right frequently based their views on past experience:

'... I've just not found [Jobcentres] very helpful in the past...it is always packed, always busy, always queues, always people getting upset and angry about something...but it's probably the lack of support from advisers more than anything else'

(IB partner, female)

External agencies were said by some partners to have offered more customised help, better suited to their needs and circumstances:

'With [local support agency] they've sorted out...gaps in the CV where I've been to prison...then the questions that they'll ask me...for an interview, I've done like...role play that's it, yeah...I've never had that from the Jobcentre!'

(JSA partner, female)

Some London partners assumed they were not entitled to help because they cohabited and were not married:

'... they just ignore me...unmarried couples [who are] living together...as a family, because at the moment they don't recognise that.'

(JSA partner, male)

Others, having been told they were not (yet) eligible for the kind of help they wanted, assumed the restrictive eligibility criteria applied to help more broadly:

'... when I asked them can you help me get a CSCS card or help me like get some training or...get a qualification, they don't, they just say no we can't help you.'

(JSA partner, male)

'[I said] I would I like to go on courses. They tried to get me to go onto a course...but they refused to sign me up because I wasn't actually on the paper [work] to say that [my partner] was signing on for me. So they refused to do it.'

(JSA partner, female)

Many London partners assumed, but some stated their (claiming) partner had been told by Jobcentre Plus staff, that only the benefit claimant had access to Jobcentre Plus help and support:

'Because the house is in [my partner's name], she has to claim JSA so she can get Housing Benefit, but she can't get IS because I'm here, so I have to be the carer of the children but then the Jobcentre won't help me get work, because I'm the partner and...they don't see me as relevant so they won't help me. It's difficult because they don't recognise me.'

(JSA partner, male)

'I was asking that day and saying my partner would like to...look for employment, but...the help's for the main [claiming] partner.'

(JSA main claimant, female)

Particularly in London, advisers tended to assume that the main claimant (usually male) was the job seeker and the partner (usually female) the main carer, treating them accordingly. However, the reverse could often be the case. Even when the claimant was female and the partner male, advisers treated the main claimant as the job seeker and generally assumed that the partner was not interested in work.

During his observed WFIP, one job seeking partner enquired whether it would be possible to claim jointly as a couple since both he and his female partner (the main claimant) were looking for work. The adviser informed him that usage of job points was discretionary and that, as a partner, he was not eligible for help with training. Recounting this exchange during his face-to-face interview, the partner seemed resigned to waiting things out:

'If you were able to access the job search bank and training opportunities that they provide you know this would be useful!...The lady yesterday was saying that they do let people use [the job points] if they're not busy, [but] the training centres are...not available if you're a partner...they can send people now but not unless you're actually the one registered.'

(JSA partner, male)

The role of main claimant and partner, moreover, were not always fixed. Couple parents sometimes switched claims to reflect changing circumstances and to maximise their entitlement to benefits. One (female) JSA claimant whose partner was in fact the main job seeker contacted Jobcentre Plus for clarification after he was told at his WFIP that he was not entitled to help:

'The Jobcentre's...not able to help my partner, that's what they've told me...He's had one interview but...they look at him as though he's looking after the children....I phoned up...and they said no madam I can't help you. But why my partner can't receive the same help as me?'

(JSA main claimant, female)

The irony of being required to attend a mandatory appointment only to be informed he was not entitled to help, was not lost on this partner:

'I'm normally up on my research in current affairs and guidance of Jobcentres and the rest of it so it was a surprise...it does seem a little absurd to call people in to tell them you can't do anything for them!'

(JSA partner, male)

Several partners were keen to retrain or gain a qualification prior to getting work. Some had identified suitable courses but were disappointed to be told that they, or the course, was ineligible for help from Jobcentre Plus. Some of those interested in full-time college courses were advised that enrolling would require them to sign off benefits:

'I spoke to [my adviser] on the phone and he said...you'll have to sign off while you're doing the course, and sign back on again when the course has finished...he said, you'll be no worse off but you will have to sign off to enter onto this course.'

(JSA partner, male)

Others had been told, or assumed they would only be eligible for help after 12 or 18 months of their partner claiming:

'You've got to be on there a good 18 months before they'll even help you out...Which is wrong, because if you're out of work they should give you opportunities to try and better yourself but not wait 18 months.'

(JSA partner, male)

In the non-London pilot area, and regardless of whether partners expressed any interest in working, WFIPs were on the whole longer and more productive. Advisers were said to be friendly and helpful, offering partners a range of different options:

'At the Jobcentre...they're there to help and they do help you.'

(IB partner, female)

'The lady at the Jobcentre she says that...any help I need she'll help me.'

(JSA partner, female)

Having had their concerns allayed about being forced into work, partners here were often relieved and surprised by the relaxed manner of their adviser and the offer of voluntary help:

'It was pleasant, she's a really pleasant lady, yeah really friendly and as I say I was a bit nervous when I first went because you know I didn't know what to expect but she soon put you at ease.'

(JSA partner, female)

In the non-London pilot, main claimants, too, were often grateful for the help and support offered to their partners, some contrasting it with their own treatment and experiences of Jobcentre Plus:

'They've been great with [my partner], they've given her a clothing allowance so she could have clothes for the school and everything, which has helped her a lot...They don't give me anything, they give her anything her wants, her can do a course how many hours her wants. Because I'm the main claimant, I can't do anything over 16 hours.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Although none of the partners interviewed in any area had taken up any of the measures under consideration, in the non-London pilot, a small minority had been caseloaded onto the New Deal for Partners for help which included basic skills training and self-employment advice. In each case, the WFIP had been serendipitous, coming at an opportune time:

'I started the ball rolling by saying I would like to...investigate starting a business...They phoned up Business Link...and I enrolled onto a four week seminar course to put a business plan together which...I'm in the middle of doing...that's the only time I've been in the Jobcentre in...12, 14 years...[My adviser] was very encouraged to get me to go to Business Link.'

(IB partner, male)

'I'm hoping to go on a course...to maybe become a carer, so I'm looking into that at the moment...The Jobcentre called me in to say...we should have a chat about careers and stuff like that and they kind of got me going...that was the first time I'd been...since we've been married...20 years!'

(JSA partner, female)

This partner, whose husband had been unemployed for the best part of 20 years, had raised a family of three children entirely on benefits. With her youngest child now approaching 15 years of age, she knew the family's Child Tax Credit (CTC) would soon reduce. On the strength of a six-monthly WFIP, she had been persuaded to join NDP and was due to attend a training course with a view to starting part-time work:

'We looked at the job things...I printed two off and I says 'oh these look interesting'...but I haven't got my food and hygiene certificate... I didn't realise...that I could do that through the Jobcentre. So I think I'll go for that because I do enjoy that sort of work.'

(JSA partner, female)

Advisers seemed at a loss, to know what to do, however, if partners viewed work as a future or distant possibility, but were not immediately work ready. Included in this group were a relatively large group of partners who wanted to work in the foreseeable future but, due to their low earnings potential (whether due to low skills or because they could only work part-time due to caring responsibilities), were waiting for their partner to move into work first:

'... I told her the situation I was in where I'm in limbo at the moment, you know, she just agreed and that was it.'

(JSA partner, female)

4.3 Childcare

Childcare rarely seemed to feature in discussions between advisers and partners. However, that said, very few partners interviewed cited the lack of childcare as a barrier to work and, in both areas, the demand for registered childcare was said to be low. Mostly this reflected a marked preference among couple parents to care for children themselves or to make their own arrangements either by working around school hours or by juggling work with informal childcare provided by family or friends:

'To be honest we'd make it so [childcare] didn't have to happen...If I had to work nights instead and she did the day with them at school and do it that way...I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving them with other people full stop.'

(JSA partner, male)

Affordability was an important consideration, particularly in London where registered childcare was not only expensive, but frequently cost more than what many partners could realistically earn:

'... it is always an issue that you have to look at...you're going out to work and ..giving away most of the money just to have them looked after.'

(JSA partner, female)

'The jobs that I've looked at at the Jobcentre, it's all minimum wage and I have to think is it worth minimum wage to go all the way to central [London] every day, minusing the costs to look after the baby that I'm going to have to pay?'

(JSA partner, female)

However, regardless of affordability and any help with childcare costs they may have been entitled to, given the choice, many partners preferred to stay at home until their children reached school age rather than work, as they saw it, to pay for a childminder or nursery:

'[Childcare] is very expensive so if we was both working I don't know if it's worth it then, giving someone your money when you don't even want to, because you've got to go to work!'

(JSA partner, female)

'I don't really understand going to work to find the money to get a childminder to pay for them when...you're still struggling with pennies anyway, the same as you are when you're on benefits.'

(JSA partner, female)

The cost of paying for childcare was also of secondary importance compared to the deep seated distrust many parents had with 'leaving your children with strangers:'

'The thought of somebody else looking after them...I'm not too keen on that...it's the person which is unknown...because you read everything lately don't you?'

(JSA partner, female)

Some mothers had gone back to work after a period of maternity leave only to give their job up some time later in order to care for their child full time. These mothers wanted to spend time at home while their children were babies or toddlers, accepting they would simply have to manage on less money:

'After a year I just decided enough was enough, because I just felt...the time with them being little is so short...it would be a shame to be missing out on all these things like learning to talk... and who's going to be with him? The childminder, and she's going to be seeing all that...We just thought well we'll manage on one salary, so we did.'

(JSA partner, female)

Among many such partners was the clear intention to return to work at a later date but, in the meantime, they were simply enjoying time at home 'being a mum.'

'I left on maternity...and...I just never went back...I probably could get my old job back...if I wanted to, but it's a choice at the minute really...to be truthful I'm a worker, I don't like not working if you like, but I just took time out to be a mum.'

(JSA partner, female)

Among the small minority of partners who were interested in registered childcare, few had been offered advice about what was available locally or the financial help they might be entitled to. It was not uncommon for partners to assume that only well paid parents could afford formal childcare and that only lone parents or couples on very low incomes were entitled to help with costs:

'We'd have to have a real good job...to have the childcare, because I've heard of people having the childcare, you've got to have a real good job to have them in a place like that.'

(IB partner, female)

'I know you can get help of course if you're a single parent and you are on a very low income.'

(JSA partner, female)

Some parents had received leaflets, but good quality information and advice about the availability of local childcare and any help towards paying for it was said to be limited:

'You might get...a leaflet...but you don't actually get any proper information, it's not actually given to you...I've never seen any information about childcare in the local area.'

(JSA partner, female)

As a result, opportunities that might have helped both parents into work were being missed. One partner was keen to return to work but with a child under the age of one, needed to find appropriate and affordable childcare. She was initially the main JSA claimant but had switched the claim to IS when heavily pregnant. After the birth, she resumed signing on, but after being unable to find work, the claim was switched back to her partner. Her partner (now the main claimant) was regularly signing on and she had recently attended a six-month WFIP, but the issue of childcare had never been raised with either of them:

'... I see other parents going out and working and their kids are in childcare and I just think... how are you doing it?...If you calculate your wages and whatever, you can't afford it, so there is something in there that we don't know about.'

(JSA partner, female)

4.4 Jobsearch

Because the choices of one parent so closely affected the other, partners mostly mirrored the work aspirations of the claiming parents. If the partner was economically inactive, for example through illness or disability, then they were too. Similarly, if their partner was looking for work then so were they. Work-related decisions were thus mostly made jointly and mutually:

'It would be a joint decision [to go to work] because...whatever each one of us does it's going to affect the other.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Few couples believed it would be possible to manage financially if only the partner went to work:

'I think if I went back to work we'd both have to go back to work, because financially we couldn't afford just for one wage to come into the house.'

(IB partner, female)

It was, therefore, not uncommon for JSA parents to be both looking for work at the same time. Some couples had no firm preference and were quite flexible about the hours worked or who should move into work first:

'I think ideally I suppose we'd still be thinking along the lines of [male partner] as being the main earner, like the full time worker and if I, and me [female partner] doing part time, but that is still flexible really with us.'

(JSA partner)

For other couples, because of wage differentials between mothers and fathers and the need to fit work around caring for children, a move into work for many partners was contingent upon the parent with the highest earning potential finding work first. Usually, this was the male parent, who also tended to be the main claimant, but, as noted previously, this was not always the case. Lower earnings potential, whether through fewer hours worked or lower wage rates, meant that many female partners were reluctant to be first to move into work because of the financial implications on the couple's benefits:

'What we're worried about [is] if I was to get a job, how it would affect the benefits? That's one of our main concerns because if I don't earn enough to pay the mortgage and pay for other things then we're not going to be in a better situation than we are now. That's one of our main concerns.'

(JSA partner, female)

Several unemployed homeowners were also concerned about the loss of mortgage protection cover if only the partner moved into work, particularly if the work was part-time or low paid:

'We've got a two year...mortgage insurance but we know that if we.. get a job.. we won't be able to claim...at the end of the day we know we've got our safety net.'

(JSA partner, female)

Faced with this typical scenario, advisers were said to be unsure of how to respond:

'[With them] both in full time school I wouldn't mind getting back, because I've always worked, but...we're waiting now for [my partner]... because I want to find out about [him] finding a job and then I'll find something to work round his hours...After I told her the situation I was in...[my adviser] just agreed ...'

(JSA partner, female)

Although many WFIPs were attended by both parents, only the work aspirations of the partner would be addressed. Typically, partners would be told to return for further help if their circumstances changed, but once the main claimant moved into work, the partner would no longer be eligible for help.

What many partners said they wanted, but rarely seemed to get, was clear advice on the impact on benefits and income if they, their partner, or indeed both of them moved into work:

'I just want someone to sit there and just talk to me...just explain what we're entitled to and how we're entitled to it or what the conditions are.'

(JSA partner, female)

'Each case is individual isn't it?...for our case...I'm caring for the two of them...I have to care for my partner and I have to care for my son, and I've got my dad as well...maybe they need to get a...big list down and say this is what we can do for you and pick out what's relevant to you, maybe that might be a help instead of you guessing.'

(IB partner, female)

Few partners said they had had a Better Off Calculation (BOCs) done, although some recalled mention having been made of a BOC during a WFIP. Where they had been carried out, BOCs tended to be calculated on the basis of one parent – the partner – working part-time – since they generally allowed them to fit work around their caring responsibilities. None were said to have shown the couple to be appreciably better off under these circumstances; at best, they 'broke even' compared with their previous entitlement to benefits, particularly if there were more than two children living at home. As such, BOCs served mainly to reinforce the perception that work would only pay if both parents found work:

'They give you a talk about if you were going back to work what benefits you could claim...They said I'd break even....and that was £6.75 an hour and they calculated it all over the 12 months and...it just worked out that I'd be slap bang level apart from an extra £10 on top which is what they'd pay me for going to work...so I won't find a job until he does because it's pointless otherwise.'

(JSA partner, female)

There was no evidence that BOCs included both parents in the calculation or allowed for different scenarios to be calculated regarding the financial implications of working or of different hours worked by one or both parents. Indeed, because they could take up to half an hour to complete, in the interests of efficiency, staff in the London pilot had been advised against conducting BOCs unless there was a genuine and realistic prospect of work.³¹

4.5 Summary

- In the non-London pilot, LPAs were mostly responsible for delivering WFIPs and, therefore, for delivering the extension to partners. Not all of them felt they had the right knowledge and skills; some believed partners faced a different set of barriers to lone parents, which required different expertise.
- In the London pilot, WFIPs were delivered by Mainstream advisers many of whom viewed these interviews as a distraction from their main role, and partners as a group set apart from their mandatory customers.
- Partners in the London pilot generally had short, routine meetings with advisers. Many felt the advice was rushed and cursory and the support on offer unconnected with their role as parents. Some had been told that, as partners, they were not eligible for help
- Partners in the non-London pilot had longer meetings, but very few of them had moved onto the New Deal for Partners and none had taken up any of the pilot measures.
- In both areas, Mainstream advisers tended to assume that the main claimant (usually male) was the job seeker and the partner (usually female) was the main carer, although the reverse could often be the case. It was also not uncommon for both parents in the couple to be interested in work,

³¹ Some London Jobcentre Plus offices were involved in the 'LEAN initiative' designed to improve efficiency by reducing unproductive activity.

- Separate interview arrangements for partners and main claimants meant that advisers were often oblivious to the presence of a job seeking parent in the household, or of the implications this might have on the support needs of the partner
- Work for the parent with lower earnings potential, usually the partner, was often considered to be only feasible when the parent with higher earnings capacity (usually the main claimant) had found a job.
- Advisers seemed at a loss to know what to do if partners viewed work as a future possibility, but were not immediately work ready. Included in this group were partners who wanted to work but were waiting for the claiming partner to move into work first.
- There was no evidence that support, including BOCs, included both adults in the couple or allowed for different scenarios to be calculated regarding the financial implications of one or both parents working. However, this is what some interviewed parents expressed a specific need for.

5 Awareness and take up of pre-employment support measures

This chapter covers delivery arrangements for New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pre-employment measures including Discovery Events, More Voluntary Contact (MVC), Childcare Assist and Flexible provision for training procurement, together with awareness and views of the measures among staff and couple parent customers. It draws almost exclusively on the views and experiences of Jobcentre Plus staff since customer interviews failed to identify any couple parents who had taken up, or were even aware of, the specific measures under consideration. The opinions of staff, too, mostly concern those of Lone Parent advisers and are strongly influenced by their experiences of supporting lone parents. Very few were able to offer opinions based on their experiences of actual take up by couple parents.

5.1 Discovery Events

Discovery Events started life as Discovery Weeks, a week long course intended to increase the number of participants joining New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and moving into work. The programme was designed as an intensive form of support during which participants were given the opportunity to explore aptitudes, interests and career paths and to address any concerns and constraints they had to starting work. Held at venues other than Jobcentre Plus, the events were contracted out to external providers and delivered in community settings to fit around school hours. Contractors determined the content of their own programmes, but key features included participation from employers and local childcare, training and education providers. The aim was to enable lone parents who were not current participants of NDLP to engage with employers and service providers in a relaxed, non-threatening environment. Participating lone parents were encouraged to access work or training or join NDLP.

Findings from previous evaluations of Discovery Weeks and Discovery Events have been mixed. Discovery Weeks were found to be popular among participating lone parents, but expensive to deliver and not cost effective in terms of progression onto NDLP and work.³² Introduced as a less costly, scaled down version of Discovery Weeks, Discovery Events are run over two or three consecutive days, rather than a full week. Evaluations of the original ND+fLP pilots and their extension to Wales and Scotland also found their success to be variable. In some areas, take up was very low, with providers having to rely on Jobcentre Plus advisers for referrals. Other areas fared much better, achieving good participation levels and positive outcomes.

Previous research found that the content and length of the events also varied. Some providers felt that Discovery Weeks involved an overly long commitment of time, while others believed two days to be too short a period in which to make a real difference.³³ Some provision was considered good, some poor. Lone Parent advisers questioned whether the events offered value for money or delivered anything additional to what they provided as part of the standard lone parent offer. Across all the pilots, data and management information on take up and outcomes was patchy and unreliable.

³² Department for Work and Pensions (2006) 'Work Works' final evaluation report, Working Paper 35 p11.

³³ Hosain and Breen (2007) p 53.

In April 2008, eligibility for Discovery Events was extended to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all London Districts. As with lone parents, eligibility is restricted to main claimant and partner customers not currently participating in, nor having participated in a New Deal programme in the last six months.

Reflecting the findings of earlier studies, views of the value and effectiveness of the events were equivocal. In the non-London pilot, four events targeted on the wider eligible parent group had been delivered during the year, with mixed success. A new contractor had apparently improved take up among lone parents and the number of partners was also said to be increasing, although attendance by main claimant parents was negligible. With no formal monitoring or feedback from providers about attendance and outcomes for the different groups of parents, gauging relative effectiveness was problematic. Nevertheless, a push to recruit partners was believed to have had some measurable success, yet to be reflected in conversion rates to New Deal for Partners (NDP):

'The numbers of partners has been increasing...I'd say about a third had actually been partners. So there is a big increase...It's a bit too early to say about [being] converted into NDLP or NDP.'

(Manager)

Advisers in this case study area remained sceptical, questioning the purpose, need and value for money of the events when they offered the same or similar support, albeit over a longer and less intensive period. The increased frequency of lone parent and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) partner Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) had moreover rendered the category of 'customers not engaging with Jobcentre Plus' somewhat superfluous:

'If we're dealing with WFIs...we do our job by promoting what help and support there is and if a customer's interested...you think well don't sell it too good because if I can just sell them a Discovery Event with the view that they are then going to engage with us afterwards, then why are we paying for the Discovery Event when we've already done the job?'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Many posed the question; why refer a customer showing any interest in work or training to a Discovery Event when they could be caseloaded for further help or moved directly onto NDLP or NDP for which they would gain the credit?

'If you've got a customer and you've dangled the carrot and they're interested in what you're saying then they'll come straight on to the NDLP programme or the NDP programme...but if they're already on a programme then really we can't send them...because we've already got them engaged, and if they're not interested whatsoever then it seems a bit pointless trying to promote Discovery Events.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

For genuinely undecided customers, Discovery Events could perhaps fulfill a useful role, some staff thought, by delivering over an intensive three days what might otherwise take them six interviews to cover. The eligibility criteria which restricted attendance to parents who were not participating in a New Deal programme remained 'a sticking point,' however:

'If they've gone to a Discovery Event for three days and there's a lot of stuff that would probably take us half a dozen interviews...to do...BOCs, childcare discussions, training, you see there could be a lot of stuff that it would take us a while to get across... But there's the eligibility criteria which is a sticking point.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Poor incentives for advisers to sell Discovery Events to customers remained a key issue. Only if credited for their input, for example through recording referrals as MVC, were advisers willing to actively promote the provision to customers.

These views were strongly echoed in the London pilot area, where managers and advisers alike testified to the events' lack of success. The contracted provider was said to have offered nothing additional to NDLP, and had been unable to attract new customers; most participants were said to be already engaging with Jobcentre Plus:

'... the people that actually turn up for these events are all people that we've already engaged with anyway and the things that they're offering them which is building confidence...most of the time they didn't have employers there, exploring career paths, which we do anyway with the advisory interviews...They're supposed to be bringing in new people that we haven't engaged with...it just wasn't value for money.'

(Childcare Partnership Manager)

Options and Choices events for lone parents moving from Income Support (IS) to JSA were also said to have supplanted Discovery Events in terms of profile and priority. With Options and Choices also winning out in terms of employer engagement, Discovery Events were considered a somewhat diluted product:

'When Discovery Weeks...first came in...it was about going out and engaging and then moving on to NDLP...and there were more employers involved and it was just a different programme...they've diluted it...and there's an issue...where we're going out asking for employers to put on Options and Choices,...you can only ask an employer for so much.'

(Manager)

Lone Parent advisers were reluctant to promote Discovery Events either to their customers, or to mainstream colleagues supporting couple parents:

'In order to encourage somebody to go to something...you've got to be sold on it yourself. Perhaps because we haven't run very many Discovery Events and because...the other advisers, but mainly Lone Parent Advisers, haven't seen much of an outcome, they've not got anything historically to be able to tell their customers.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

In fact, regardless of their success or otherwise, mainstream advisers had very limited knowledge of Discovery Events. Even when they did show some recognition, most believed they were for lone parents rather than something that mainstream parent customers and their partners might participate in, or indeed be eligible for:

'Discovery Events...that's something the lone parents do...I don't know that we do it in our cluster.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Customers strongly confirmed these findings. None of the customers observed and subsequently interviewed in either pilot area had attended a Discovery Event and very few had heard of them. A small number of partners from the non-London pilot area said they were aware of Discovery Events, but none expressed any interest in attending. For all these reasons, it would appear that, to date, Discovery Events have had virtually no impact on the wider parent customer group.

5.2 More Voluntary Contact

MVC was introduced as part of the original ND+fLP pilots. The offer of MVC is intended for lone parents whom it is thought would benefit from adviser help and advice prior to moving into work, but who have not joined an appropriate New Deal programme, either because they are not yet ready or not yet eligible for this support. In April 2008, MVC was extended to main claimant parents and their partners. Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) customers on a Pathways Programme would receive any additional contact needed from their provider. For JSA customers, the purpose of MVC is to allow an adviser to advise and caseload their clients between mandatory meetings without the conditionality attached to the JSA regime, prior to them entering a mandatory New Deal programme.

Earlier evaluations found that definitional issues around MVC had caused confusion, and staff were unclear how it should be recorded. Lone Parent advisers (LPAs) generally understood MVC to mean a less intense engagement with customers than case-loading, involving follow-up phone calls to customers in between mandatory WFIs, but this was something most LPAs did routinely as part of their job.³⁴ Later attempts at clarification resulted in outreach work and referrals to Discovery Events being recorded as MVC on LMS, but confusion about the definition and purpose of MVC remained.³⁵ Increasing MVC was reported to be the only target set for the original pilots. As such, it appeared to be functioning as a mechanism for recording pilot data in the absence of anything else.

MVC was a term only recognised and understood by LPA staff and managers involved in the original pilot. As in previous evaluations, staff confirmed that MVC was part of the standard lone parent offer and nothing additional to NDLP; it was thought to be what a good adviser did routinely for his or her customer:

'We do that anyway...that's exactly what our NDLP is about.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Even then, with the introduction of quarterly WFIs, it was considered very unlikely that a lone parent would be seen between mandatory appointments without having first joined NDLP.

'More voluntary contact is supposed to be in between the work focused interviews...but realistically unless the customer agrees to join the lone parent programme, it's not likely to happen...'

(Advisory Services Manager)

In the non-London pilot, staff involved in outreach activities in Children's Centres continued to record MVC on Labour Market System (LMS). However, in London, where the outreach team had been disbanded, with the introduction of new services for lone parents and the recent influx of new benefit claimants, staff resources were already stretched without the added burden of voluntary meetings:

'Because of...resource issues and...all the other changes that are coming in for the lone parents... I've got two advisers trying to do all of that and trying to keep up to date with work focused interviews and take new claims from lone parents going on to JSA...the resource doesn't support [MVC].'

(Advisory Services Manager)

³⁴ Hosain and Breen (2007) p43.

³⁵ Jenkins (2008) p35.

In neither pilot was MVC being delivered for partners or main claimants. Mainstream advisers, in particular, struggled to make sense of the concept of MVC in the context of their own working practices and prescribed interventions for JSA customers attending Jobcentre Plus on at least a fortnightly basis as a condition of receiving their benefit. Furthermore, unlike lone parents claiming IS, once a JSA customer reached more than six months of unemployment, all voluntary contact was replaced by mandatory interventions and programmes.

Not unexpectedly, none of the main claimants or partner parents interviewed had experience of MVC or said they had been offered it. Main claimant parents highlighted what, for them, was a contradiction – why attend voluntarily when so little was gained from mandatory appointments?

'I never felt it was that beneficial going to see them when I do have appointments, so why would I go and see them in between really?'

(JSA main claimant)

5.3 Childcare Assist

Childcare Assist allows for the payment of registered childcare during the week immediately prior to a parent starting work. It was introduced as part of the childcare offer within the original ND+fLP pilots in 2005. Childcare Assist was extended to partners participating in the NDP programme in April 2008.

None of the customers observed or interviewed had heard of or been in a position to take up Childcare Assist and none of the advisers involved in focus groups had any experience of using it, even with lone parents. Mainstream advisers generally had no knowledge of Childcare Assist, but among the few that had heard of it, most assumed that only lone parents were eligible; none were aware that it had been extended to partners.

LPAs, for their part, were generally quite dismissive of the efficacy of Childcare Assist:

'Childcare Assist which is the help in the week before [work]...is a complete waste of time because nobody ever uses it...it's virtually pointless.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Various reasons were given for the very low take up. Most parents were said to want, or be expected by employers, to start work more or less immediately following a job offer:

It's not used a great deal because in some, in many cases some of these parents will be offered a job on the Friday and be expected to start the following week.

(Lone Parent adviser)

Parents with a deferred start date, on the other hand, would often choose to spend time with their child in preference to placing them in childcare.

In the London pilot, the availability of Up-front Childcare Costs (UFCC), which could be used to pay for a month's childcare costs, not just a week, was said to have all but eliminated any residual demand for Childcare Assist among lone parents.

In the non-London pilot, many providers did not apparently charge for childcare during the first week of childcare, treating this period as 'settling in time,' so the lack of demand was simply because there was no need for it. Here, UFCC, which Childcare Assist could not be used for, were paid using the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF) if lone parents were eligible.

Above all else, and in both areas, the low take up of Childcare Assist was believed to be a reflection of low demand generally for registered childcare.

5.4 Access to flexible provision for training procurement

Access to flexible provision for training procurement is an additional resource available in pilot areas to enable the procurement of new training courses or provision not available elsewhere and which could help to improve access to employment among parents. In April 2008, flexible provision was extended to couple parents, although eligibility for main claimants is subject to certain conditions.³⁶

Previous evaluations of ND+fLP noted that flexible provision was a widely misunderstood and underused resource in most pilot areas. An early confusion was that it could be used to fund training courses for individual parents, whereas it is intended for larger groups of customers where a discernible demand, together with a gap in local provision, has been identified and verified. Where flexible provision has been used, it provided a useful addition to the menu of existing provision. However, procedural complexity was found to be hampering its use and effectiveness.³⁷

In both pilot areas, knowledge of flexible provision was mostly restricted to LPAs; Mainstream advisers were largely unaware that main claimants or partners might be eligible. Both areas reported underuse of flexible provision, though for slightly different reasons. Referencing the wide choice of training said to be available locally for lone parents, staff in the non-London pilot attributed underuse to a lack of need and demand. Lower Value Procurement³⁸ and externally funded provision delivered by local further education colleges was said to work well and to meet existing demand for training among lone parents:

'A lot of training probably just goes through the conventional LVP, the existing system. So although it's there and it's useful...I don't think it's been used...So we're aware of it but we've got an existing system that works quite well.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Competition for lone parent customers was said to be high among external providers and with plenty of choice and multiple ways of accessing the same provision, LPAs could choose the simplest route requiring the least amount of paperwork; a method which suited them and their customers since it reduced the time taken to process applications:

'... there's multiple ways of accessing the same thing...ESF...is so easy in comparison to the...LVP process...[involving]...paperwork and business cases and managers and then somebody else and then backwards and forwards...And I think human nature as advisers we'll go for something that's simple and works quickly ...'

(Lone Parent adviser)

This relative ease was said to contrast markedly with the bureaucratic procedures for procuring flexible provision involving lengthy form filling and multi layered decision making. By the time a business case had been made and approved, many customers were said to have moved on:

³⁶ Parents in receipt of JSA can undertake flexible provision, even if they are due to start a mandatory New Deal but New Deal for Young People (NDYP) or New Deal 25 Plus (ND25+) advisers must ensure it is compatible with later New Deal participation.

³⁷ Hosain and Breen (2007) p57.

³⁸ Lower Value Procurement (LVP) provides funding to pay for one-off courses for Welfare to Work related training activity.

'Some of these business cases to purchase all the training you need it's dragged out for a lot longer than...six months...the customer's either lost the interest or the possibility of that job...So [flexible provision] is there but not particularly utilised.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Little was known about the specific training aspirations of couple parents or whether existing provision was adequate to meet their needs. In the non-London pilot, a workshop session was planned to discuss with advisers what the training needs of partners might be, and whether these could be met from existing provision.

In London, where the availability of training was said to be low and demand among all types of customer high, under use of flexible provision was mainly attributed to the lengthy and bureaucratic procedures for accessing it:

'Flexible provision, the money is there and we keep getting hammered why aren't you spending it, but the red tape around actually getting a business case through to get this money is a nightmare....it's frustrating because we know the money's there but we just can't access it.'

(Manager)

With the district so large and diverse, identifying a group training need and arranging a suitable course that fulfilled the procurement criteria, was not only procedurally cumbersome but believed to be largely unworkable:

'It's becoming more and more difficult to identify just a specific area of training that lots of people want to go to and we are going to be able to fill a course but that isn't provided anywhere else....the restrictions that are placed around it...like it mustn't be available anywhere else and it may be that we've got a provider who can provide that training...But actually our customers might not be able to easily get to that training wherever that provider is, because we are quite a big district.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Pilot staff had purposefully sought to use the resource to meet an identified need and demand for childcare training among ethnic minority women but their attempts had been thwarted by the rules of procurement, leaving them disheartened and frustrated:

'I've tried to get some money to run this course and I know a provider who...will do the training...and I'm being told no you can't use that provider...when I've already got somebody there who has...got the actual clients that we can pull in, but I'm told no you can't use them it's got to go out to tender.'

(Manager)

LPAs were frustrated too, saying that they had fed ideas for training 'up the line' but nothing ever happened as a result:

'We feed it up to our line managers. Every now and again they come up with a list what kind of training are your customers asking for and we just farm that out, but we don't tend to get a response back.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

The relatively small amount of funding available through flexible provision restricted the type of training on offer to short courses rather than certificated training which most customers were said to want:

‘There’s a little pot of money to pay for a specialist training like, if we wanted to put on a first aid course or health and safety, or something like that, there’s a pot of money for that...Flexible funding...it is usually things like health and safety, health and hygiene, first aid.’

(Advisory Services Manager)

Mainstream advisers had no knowledge of flexible provision and little idea of which customers might be eligible for it or under what circumstances. A common mistake was to confuse it with Flexible New Deal (FND). Confirming the earlier comments of parents, many advisers observed a mismatch between the training available and fundable through Jobcentre Plus, and what many customers said they needed or wanted. Jobcentre Plus courses were either geared towards those with basic skill needs or too short to make a real difference to an individual’s job prospects. The ADF, it was said, could only be used if the customer had a job offer or demonstrable prospect of work after training:

‘We get all sorts of enquiries about training...things that we can’t help them with...They’re not interested in our little...courses...it’s quite bad saying no there’s not anything.’

(Mainstream adviser)

Most advisers referred customers to local college courses but, even here, focus was believed to have shifted towards the achievement of job outcomes, to the detriment of those furthest away from work. Advisers especially struggled to help customers with multiple barriers to employment and needing longer term assistance, including those with poor English language skills:

‘When courses were provided 30 hours a week for 6 months up to a year, people were returning to work [in] very high numbers...but now...the colleges [have] an incentive for getting a customer into work at the end of the training with ESOL which means that they vet the people...you can’t get people who need ESOL at the first stage.’

(Mainstream adviser)

For longer term unemployed JSA customers, much of the training was mandatory – including basic skills provision for customers who failed a literacy and numeracy test, New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25 Plus and New Deal 50 Plus. Advisers were unable to offer any opinions as to whether, or how, the needs of couple parents might be accommodated within the FND programme that was soon to replace the different New Deals.

5.5 Summary

- Low levels of awareness and understanding about the ND+fLP extension and of specific eligibility criteria for the extended measures were apparent among all advisers, but more especially so for Mainstream advisers supporting main claimants and partners.
- Main claimants and partners had very low levels of awareness of ND+fLP measures and In Work Credit (IWC) and none of the customers interviewed had taken up any of the extended pilot measures.

5.5.1 Discovery Events

- Mainstream advisers had very limited knowledge of Discovery Events. Most believed they were only for lone parents rather than something mainstream customers and their partners might participate in, or be eligible for.
- LPAs were undecided about the value of Discovery Events believing that Option and Choices events for lone parents moving from IS to JSA had supplanted them in terms of their profile and employer engagement.

- None of the customers interviewed in either pilot area had attended a Discovery Event. A small number of partners from the non-London pilot area said they were aware of Discovery Events, but none had been interested in attending.

5.5.2 More Voluntary Contact

- MVC was a term only recognised and understood by LPA staff and managers involved in the original pilot. Among these staff, MVC was considered to be part of the standard lone parent offer.
- MVC made little sense to Mainstream advisers operating in the context of mandatory jobseeking regimes and programmes.

5.5.3 Childcare Assist

- None of the customers interviewed had heard of or taken up Childcare Assist and none of the staff consulted had any experience of using it, even with lone parents.
- In the London pilot, the availability of UFCC was believed by staff to have all but eliminated any demand for Childcare Assist among lone parents.
- In the non-London pilot, advisers accessed the ADF in preference to Childcare Assist which was felt to be too restrictive and consequently rarely used.
- In both areas, the low take up of Childcare Assist was believed to be a reflection of low demand generally for registered childcare.

5.5.4 Flexible provision

- Flexible provision had rarely been accessed in either pilot area. Where it had, it had been used to purchase provision for lone parents, not couple parents.
- Advisers observed a mismatch between the training available and fundable through Jobcentre Plus, and what many customers said they needed or wanted; recognised, certificated courses to help improve their job prospects.
- In the London pilot, where the availability of training was said to be low and demand among customers high, under-use of flexible provision was mainly attributed to the lengthy and bureaucratic procedures for accessing it.
- In the non-London pilot, underuse of flexible provision was said to be due to the plentiful local supply of externally funded training courses for lone parents, which advisers found easier to access than Jobcentre Plus funded provision. This provision was not however, accessible to main claimant or partner parents.

6 Awareness and take up of post employment support

This chapter explores the delivery of post employment support measures including In Work Credit (IWC), In Work Advisory Support (IWAS) and the In Work Emergency Discretion Fund (IWEDF), together with awareness of, and attitudes towards, the measures by Jobcentre Plus staff, main claimant customers and their partners. It draws on the experiences and views of Jobcentre Plus staff and customers both in London and outside of London.

It is important to emphasise that very few customers involved in the research had heard of any of these measures and none had any experience of taking them up at the time of their interview. With no prior knowledge or personal experience of the measures, customers were asked instead to provide more general opinions of the measures having been told about them by the researcher. Customer responses and attitudes expressed in this chapter should, therefore, be viewed in this context.

6.1 In Work Credit

Although IWC pre-dates the introduction of the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilots and has been available to couple parents in most London districts since 2005,³⁹ it is an important part of the integrated package of measures which makes up ND+fLP. IWC for lone and couple parents was increased in London districts to £60 per week in 2007 and was extended to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot areas outside of London, at £40 per week, in July 2008.

Praised by Lone Parent advisers (LPAs) and universally popular among lone parents, IWC has, to date, been viewed as the ‘jewel in the crown’ of the ND+fLP pilots.⁴⁰ Evaluation evidence strongly supported the hypothesis that much of the success of the pilots measured in terms of lone parents leaving benefits for work, could be attributed to the impact of IWC.⁴¹ In extending the reach of IWC, it was hoped that similar success might be achieved with couple parents.

Evidence from the current evaluation indicates that expectations have yet to be met. In both pilot areas, take up of IWC among couple parents was reported to be extremely low. Since its introduction, the number of partners claiming IWC in the non-London pilot was believed to have barely reached double figures, while at any one time, active claims were said to be in single figures. Among main claimants, take up was thought to be negligible, although no precise figures were available:

‘[Since IWC was extended] we had at any one time about five active claims...in all there was about 13, 14 claims doing In Work Credit for couple parents.’

(Diary Administrative Support Officer)

³⁹ IWC was not extended to couple parents in the pilot London district involved in the research until July 2008.

⁴⁰ Hosain and Breen (2007) p60.

⁴¹ Brewer *et al.* (2007) and 2009.

'I'm not sure how we compare with the rest of the country but...[IWC take up by couples] is very very low.'

(Manager)

In the London pilot, virtually all the take up to date was attributed to lone parents. Even the increase in IWC from £40 to £60, believed to have boosted take up among lone parents, had not apparently impacted on couples. Aware that take up by couples was low, pilot staff had tried to disaggregate data for the different parent customer groups, but without success. Anecdotal reports of low take up were however, widespread and consistent:

'We wanted...to see whether...the parents were taking up the IWC... it's very difficult for us to track it unless we've got some kind of scan...to work from, because we don't know what's going on in all the different Jobcentres. So we just had to give up on that.'

(Manager)

Reasons suggested by staff for the low level of IWC take up among couple parents were many and various. Part of the reason was thought to be the much lower volume of couple parents compared with lone parents. The recession was also believed to have had an adverse effect on take up, as it had with lone parents, due to a reduction in the availability and sustainability of jobs:

'Of ...13, 14 claims [for] In Work Credit for couple parents and I'd say probably only about 3 or 4 of them are actually still on it...because of the recent economic problems...'

(DASO)

Low awareness and usage of IWC by advisers was, however, recognised as a key issue. In London, advisers had, until relatively recently, mostly been unaware that IWC eligibility had been extended to couples. Mainstream advisers participating in focus groups confirmed they had only very recently discovered that couple parents were eligible for IWC, although many still believed that eligibility only applied to the partner and not the main claimant:

'When IWC for partners came out...I didn't think that anybody knew, actually knew about it because it wasn't sold to the adviser...They may have been getting partners into work but not knowing that in-work credit was available to them.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Advisers were also said to be unaware that IWC processing had been centralised across the District. Pilot staff believed that low take up to date could be due to the reluctance of advisers to process IWC claims, in the mistaken belief this would be difficult and time consuming. There was an expectation that, once advisers realised that IWC processing was managed centrally, take up among partners would increase:

'I think you'll find that it will start to increase now because previously our advisers weren't aware that you were doing the paperwork for...the couple parents so I think that's why a lot of the time it wasn't being pushed...but now they know that the paperwork's all going to be done for them, hopefully we'll have more referrals to it.'

(Manager)

However, in the non-London pilot, where the extension of IWC eligibility to couple parents and centralised processing arrangements were more widely known about, take up appeared to be equally low. Here, the stringent and complex eligibility criteria were cited as more important factors.

6.1.1 IWC eligibility criteria

According to staff, the lengthy qualifying period of 12 months continuous receipt of benefit was believed to be one of the main reasons for low take up of IWC. Since the research was conducted, the eligibility rules have been relaxed and short breaks of up to five days in the benefit claim are now permitted. However, at the time of fieldwork, there were no linking rules to cover short periods of non-entitlement and a break of even one day would result in the customer (and his or her partner) not qualifying. Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers who had been sanctioned or disallowed benefit would thus forfeit their eligibility (unless they had received a hardship payment):

'I think the problem was with the main claimants...sometimes they can have sanctions which break their eligibility.'

(Manager)

Staff also thought that parents claiming JSA were much more likely to have been disallowed or sanctioned, and their periods of claiming JSA considerably shorter, than most lone parents claiming Income Support (IS):

'With couple parents...on JSA...it's...going to affect that client group more than the lone parents because there's more chance of a JSA customer being sanctioned or disallowed for a day... they've then got to wait another year before they would be entitled to In Work Credit.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Switching the claim from one parent to the other was said to be another practice likely to affect eligibility for IWC. The research identified several couples who had switched the claim from one parent to the other to maximise benefits as a result of changing circumstances:

'I went onto IS because I was having [a baby], because I couldn't find a job, then after that I went back to signing on [for JSA] and I said 'look it's hopeless with me finding a job,' swap it back to him and then I'll stay at home and look after the baby and give him a chance to try and be like the main active role ...'

(IB main claimant, female)

'When I decided I was going to be the main claimant I decided right now I'm ready to go and look for work, so that's now given him the opportunity to go and study.'

(JSA main claimant, female)

'If I'd signed on [rather than my partner] they would have said well you weren't...made redundant, you left the job voluntarily, you made yourself wilfully unemployed, so your benefit will be suspended for an unclear amount of time.'

(JSA partner, male)

Advisers sought to mitigate the worst effects of these changes on customers' eligibility for help, but could do little if the customer signed on late for benefit:

'As an adviser you would be inclined to get involved to make sure there's no break [in the claim]. The thing you can't help on though is if they fail to attend or something like that; that can cause nasty little gaps in the claims.'

(Mainstream adviser)

Given typically shorter continuous periods of claiming benefits, reducing the period of IWC eligibility for couple parents from 52 to 26 weeks, and introducing day one eligibility for other measures, were suggested by some advisers as possible ways of increasing take up:

'If you've actually got someone and you know that you're moving them off benefit, does it matter how long they've been on that benefit? Let's get them off it, let's help and support them and get them back into work.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Another speculative reason for low take up among partners was that the minimum number of hours that had to be worked per week before becoming eligible for IWC might be a barrier, as it was said to be for some lone parents. Parents interested in term time work, as a teaching assistant or school playground supervisor for example, could find they were not eligible for IWC because their weekly hours were less than 16 when spread over a full year:

'One thing that we were having hiccoughs with In Work Credit was lone parents [who] want to work term time ... If they were working 16 hours a week for 32 weeks...that means that they're working under 16 hours a week so they don't qualify for In Work Credit and I thought well...some parents want term time...but we haven't had any cases [of partners].'

(Lone Parent adviser)

6.1.2 Complexity of eligibility criteria

As well as being perceived as unfair, the different eligibility criteria applying to partners, main claimants and lone parents added a further layer of complexity and another deterrent to usage by advisers:

'As far as in-work credit goes and the take up of it, there is, I think a lack of understanding of partners. The eligibility I think personally is too complicated when advisers look at it. It's a bit of a minefield, the guidance is not very clear.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

'The systems that we've got when it comes to looking at eligibility are so...confusing. You've got to be an expert...that is the reason I...think the take-up of [IWC among couple parents] is low.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Mainstream advisers and those with less experience of advising parents admitted to a certain wariness in using IWC. Compared with lone parents, the implications of giving the wrong advice were more wide-ranging, affecting as it did, the claimant as well as the partner, in addition to being potentially more serious; couple parents could not return to benefits voluntarily if the job did not work out for whatever reason. Even experienced LPAs with detailed knowledge and long standing familiarity of using IWC sometimes struggled to give the best advice to partners:

'I think it's just so complicated... for us as advisers... you get used to one set of customers that you're dealing with, with one way of dealing with the In Work Credit and the support and then they bring on another...group of people that we're required to see and help...and it becomes so complicated.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Assuming that eligibility criteria for lone and couple parents were the same, one adviser had advised a partner moving into work of 17½ hours per week⁴² that she would qualify for a range of incentives and in work benefits, which she was not in fact able to claim:

'My first partner on my caseload that's found work, it's 17½ hours a week and...I assumed that... because she was eligible for WTC that she'd also be eligible for Housing Benefit run on and Job Grant...I'd sort of promised that she would be entitled and she wasn't.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Given that advisers were confused, it was hardly surprising, some said, if customers were too. Particularly difficult was for customers to retain information about the range of measures and incentives available and the different eligibility criteria that often applied:

'I think there is a danger of information overload which is why I think we have the system where if they close the claim we will still double check...There's so much information that we get confused, so how can we expect clients not to get confused?'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Fear of giving the wrong advice or of falsely raising expectations led some advisers to withhold information about IWC from partners until they had a job offer or had at least been caseloaded for New Deal for Partners (NDP). Some waited until customers had moved into work before checking eligibility:

'Sometimes it might be better off not to mention [IWC].'

(Lone Parent adviser)

6.1.3 Selling and promoting IWC

Which customers to tell about IWC, and when, thus presented advisers with something of a dilemma. Informing customers about incentives too early in the claim ran counter to working norms, since many advisers believed it could delay a return to work:

'Should we be telling all this information to people from day 1, when they come in for a new claim, about IWC? You're basically trying to tell them to just stay on benefits for 12 months.'

(Mainstream adviser)

Waiting until the customer was within reach of becoming eligible for any particular measure before informing them about it, was thus common practice, even with lone parents:

'I wouldn't mention it if they weren't eligible because it's like this is like what you could have won!'

(Lone Parent adviser)

However, with a six month interval between mandatory Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs), deciding on the most appropriate timing for communicating information to partners about IWC was not obvious or clear-cut:

⁴² Unlike for lone parents, IWC eligibility for couples only applies to work of less than 24 hours (but more than 16) if it takes the family off benefits.

'We had a partner come in...her partner had been out of work about nine months. So obviously the next six month interview would be due and they would be well over 12 months. So I informed them that IWC...is a possibility if you reach the 12 month stage of benefit...He went and took a job...[but] he's not going to get this IWC; he'd only been out of work 11½ months. Of course she's now not happy...so at what stage do you not tell them?'

(Lone Parent Adviser)

For main claimants, the structure of New Deal and Pathways programmes often meant that by the 12 month stage of the benefit claim, many were no longer in contact with a Jobcentre Plus adviser. The highly programmed nature of mandatory interventions, moreover, gave Mainstream advisers little time to get to know customers or promote IWC to them:

'I think that with the time that is placed on advisers and all that they have to deliver in each of these interviews and for a 13 week interview they get 20 minutes...They have to look at the JS agreement and review that. They have to do a job submission. They have to do a better off calculation if it's appropriate...Unless somebody says to you, you must also tell them about this, there is probably an unconscious decision that, well there's no point in telling somebody about something they can't access now, we'll tell them about it when they can access it.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

'If you're working with somebody using you know a caseload approach when you may be seeing that person every 2 or 4 weeks, whatever it may be, so you can build up and they can build up their knowledge...but when you've got somebody who plonks down you know...it's Friday and they've got a job to start on Monday...Anything else really is just around the periphery.'

(Mainstream adviser)

Recognising these constraints, the non-London pilot intended to extend to couple parents procedures established for following up lone parents, although at the time of the research this had yet to be implemented. Here, routine practice was to check eligibility for IWC once the customer had found a job and signed off benefits:

'IWC is a classic one, because they've got 5 weeks to make a claim...so we've got that system in place...to send out application forms...it's common practice now...so if a lone parent was to start work then they would normally request an appointment with an adviser to check all their entitlements...We're not at that stage with the partners yet...with the partners it's a bit of a learning curve...'

(Advisory Services Manager)

6.1.4 Newness of IWC

In spite of the difficulties surrounding eligibility and the slowness of IWC to embed, pilot staff were nevertheless sanguine about its prospects. Since couple parents were newly eligible for the measures, the expectation was that because IWC had been successful with lone parents, given time, it would become equally effective with other parent customers. Slow take-up was thus generally attributed to the newness of IWC for this customer group:

'With the lone parents we're so used to dealing [with them] and they're so used to coming in, it's just part of the process, but...with the partners...it's a brand new thing isn't it? It's a bit of a learning curve...It's exactly how the LPs started off, bit by bit, word of mouth...the JSA customers in particular...they'll probably start to get the messages...this isn't going to go away, we are going to be kept being called back in.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

As such, many LPAs felt it would simply be a matter of time before partners would come to know about and take up the measures, as lone parents had:

'For lone parents, that's been over a period of time...At the moment we're just planting that seed...Once that seed's there and the message gets out and...they realise that there is a package of help that's available I think it will grow and it will get better.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

6.1.5 Better off in work message

Mainstream advisers were less sanguine. Previous high earners, and couples with large mortgages, a relatively new type of customer for Jobcentre Plus, were thought to be less responsive to incentives such as IWC:

'The main thing about people who have been high earners is that a lot of them have mortgage interest policies and these policies can run up to two years, so a person who has a very large mortgage...I've been doing BOCs for people who have got mortgage interest policies that are £600 a week...You're trying to find them a job and you can't...and I think the number of that type of client group is gradually going up.'

(Mainstream adviser)

Believing their customers may be little better off, or indeed worse off in work, made advisers cautious not to oversell the benefits of IWC. London couples, who generally had higher housing and transport costs, were felt to be particularly affected:

'I will never oversell anything and I will obviously...take seriously...the BOCs and we go through it thoroughly. The main issue is rent and council tax, that's the main issue that worries everyone. Worse still, are customers [who] have mortgages.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Acknowledging that some couples might be little better off, particularly if only one parent moved into work, staff conceded that the potency of IWC might be compromised:

'If the couple person goes into work...we're trying to work out whether they're actually going to be better off. But we did some calculations for them and with the WTC and with the IWC on top it did actually bring them up. But that's their main concern, I think it's the main concern for everybody isn't it? Are they, even with the £60, are they going to be better off if their Housing Benefit's going to drop?'

(Advisory Services Manager)

6.1.6 IWC awareness among customers

Given adviser working practices, it is perhaps not surprising none of the parents observed or interviewed had experience of claiming IWC. Indeed, very few main claimant or partner parents had even heard of IWC before it was described to them by the researcher. The main exceptions were

partners who had previously claimed benefits as lone parents, several of whom had participated in New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), and the small minority of partners who had joined the NDP.

One such case was a male partner who had taken up the self-employment option within NDP as a result of his one off mandatory WFIP, during which he also found out he would be eligible for Working Tax Credit (WTC):

'Yes they did mention [IWC]. £40 per week would be applicable to me...even if I...run the business myself...We can survive food shopping on £40 a week...so yes it will be a big help because it's one bill that I haven't got to find. There's also WTC I didn't realise I'd be eligible for claiming that.'

(IS partner, male)

None of the main claimants observed or interviewed had heard of IWC. Even long-term benefit claimants who, on the face of it, were eligible for IWC said they were not aware of it:

'IWC, they don't tell you about things like that. They just say this is the money you're getting, if you go on these courses you get so much extra or...your employer can have help towards your wages, they tell you that but...they haven't said nothing...about extra what you can claim on top, they never said there's extras.'

(JSA claimant, male)

It was not uncommon for IWC to be confused with WTC, with which most couple parents were familiar and some had previous experience of getting:

'Is it called In Work Credits now then, have they changed it? When we first started claiming it was called Working Tax Credit.'

(JSA partner, female)

'She confused me to tell you the truth! Because I'm sure she said something like one would have to work 16 hours to...be qualified for it, the other one would have to do obviously full time but if you worked an hour over you wouldn't get nothing...it's a bit confusing ...'

(JSA partner, female)

Others confused IWC with Income Support, Housing and Council Tax benefit run on:

'She did say... I don't know if it's [IWC] you could still claim for two weeks even though you were at work...That was a good idea because you don't want to go back to work and think...I can't afford the rent.'

(JSA partner, female)

Several customers confused IWC with an incentive employers could qualify for by employing people who were long-term unemployed:

'I was [told about] a financial incentive... I could give it to the company if I go to the interview...if the company take me on then the company get actually financial incentive from the Jobcentre.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

The different eligibility criteria seemingly applied to different in-work entitlements was also confusing. A lack of written material was felt to be particularly unhelpful in this regard:

'They could do with translating it better or even writing it down for you...or even, I mean. I took bits of notes myself but you never keep up with them do you, you lose them all?'

(JSA partner, female)

On the other hand, parents who had received materials often admitted to not reading them:

'They did give me a booklet...I never even looked at it!'

(IB partner, female)

6.1.7 Customer views of IWC

Since none of the parents interviewed had experience of claiming IWC and only a small number had heard of it, participants were asked instead for their general opinions about IWC, having had it described to them during face-to-face interviews.

Many couple parents doubted whether being eligible for IWC would make any difference to the desirability or likelihood of them working. Among those actively seeking work, many questioned how an extra £40 or £60 could incentivise something they were doing anyway:

'I think we're trying hard as it is...We just want to try and get a decent, stable job...A bonus is not an incentive to look harder.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'At the end of the day it's just what we want to do anyway is get back into work...regardless of the £40 a week...when I was at work last time you didn't get anything like that.'

(JSA partner, female)

The relatively small amount payable compared with potential earnings, was a relevant factor for many couple parents:

'What's an extra £40 to what my wages are?'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Because WTC is means tested, many assumed IWC would be too and believed it would be taken into account for the purposes of claiming in-work benefits. Doing a quick mental calculation, and substituting IWC for the amount they currently received in Housing Benefit, £40 or £60 a week for a year was considered by some as simply not enough to compensate for the long-term loss of benefits:

'Never enough!...This place is £90 a week rent...personally thinking it would probably need to be a bit more.'

(IB partner, female)

'You'd just pay more rent wouldn't you, so you wouldn't benefit from it. It's like claiming Family Tax, you work, you pay more rent, so you don't gain.'

(JSA partner, female)

Some couple parents also assumed that IWC would need to be paid back if the job did not last:

'There are people who go out to work thinking oh I'm going to get an extra £40 a week have got to remember you only get it for so long!...And if you leave your job within 6 months you've got to pay it back haven't you?'

(JSA partner, female)

Others, whose previous earnings were above the limit for getting WTC, challenged the very notion they might be eligible for IWC:

'I looked into it when we were both working, and when I was working singly...it seems to start tapering off at 13 grand and disappear completely in the 20s...Maybe I didn't interpret it correctly...in which case I shall be quite annoyed...but are they really going to give [IWC] to you...if you're bringing in £30,000 or more as a family unit? I can't see it!'

(JSA partner, female)

Among those who were more undecided about work, some speculated that IWC might make a difference to taking a job where the wage rate or earnings were low:

'... I think [IWC] would be a factor in making a decision because it's not to be sniffed at is it? It could be quite helpful...I suppose maybe the less money you were on the more that could make a bit of a difference to bringing it up to...a reasonable standard.'

(JSA main claimant)

Some also thought getting IWC might persuade them to take part-time rather than full-time work, or enable them to reduce the number of hours they needed to work:

'[IWC] wouldn't make a difference to whether I went to work or not, if it wasn't there I would still hopefully try and get into work, it might make a difference with the hours.'

(JSA partner, female)

'I'm looking for jobs anyway. If there's anything to top it up, maybe I can...look for maybe more flexible hours, less hours...[or] if something part time comes up. Ideally I'm looking for full time jobs because financially it would be advisable, even if this £60 helps me to go out and find a part time job I think it would be great.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

A few couple parents conjectured that if the amount of IWC payable was higher or payable to both parents at the same time, it might change their job seeking behaviour. Even then, among parents claiming incapacity benefits, health was said to be the decisive factor in determining whether or not they worked. Indeed, having an illness or disability was generally viewed as a more fundamental constraint to employment than being a parent was.

'I don't think £40 makes much of a difference to be truthful, you know when I return to work it's because I need, I want to...I don't think £40 would be a lot to swing the direction really!...£80 would make a big difference wouldn't it?...but I'm not ready to go back to work yet, until my health condition's OK.'

(IB main claimant, male)

Having to wait 12 months before becoming eligible for IWC was seen as unfair, even perverse, by some parents:

'That's what confuses you, you've got to wait...it's like people that want to work don't get the help and people that don't want to work get everything thrown at them...it seems to be backwards.'

(JSA partner, female)

For the majority of parents who wanted to work, getting IWC was seen more as a bonus, boosting earnings in the short term but making little difference to decision making about work:

'[IWC] would probably make it more worthwhile, but I want to go back to work anyway, that's just an added bonus ...'

(JSA partner, female)

'I'd go to work anyway, if I'm ready to go to work I would, but I mean obviously if you're getting a little bit more cash, that's just...an extra little boost.'

(JSA partner, female)

In this respect, the 12 month limit for receipt of IWC was seen as a major drawback:

'I know generally that there are things available...they were never significant enough to persuade anybody to take a job because they were all so short term...even the less forward thinking folk are going to [ask] what happens after that? So...a nice gesture but not significant enough to persuade anybody.'

(JSA partner, male)

'It could leave people in some difficulty if they do reach the end of that year and suddenly have to come up with a £60 a week drop.'

(JSA partner, female)

Underlying much of the doubt and reticence about IWC were concerns highlighted earlier regarding the perceived risk of moving into work. A key issue affecting the willingness of couple parents to move off benefits related as much to considerations of risk, and of the disruption caused by making the transition from benefits to employment, as to purely 'better off in work' calculations and decisions. Many preferred the security of benefits even if they might theoretically be financially better off in work. Given the option of staying poor on benefits or remaining poor, as they saw it, in work, many had opted for the former:

'If the money you're earning while you're working doesn't outweigh what you're on when you're on benefits...there's no incentive is there?'

(IB main claimant, male)

Such a view was particularly evident among workless couples in receipt of means-tested benefits such as IS which entitled the family to a range of 'passport' benefits. Compared with the security of benefits, an extra £40 a week was seen to offer little compensation, particularly as it would be withdrawn after a year:

'I've had them done for me, the calculations...The last one...didn't say I'd be any worse off...but I wouldn't be any better off...and you think is it worth it?... I've never done one of them where it's said you'll be £100 a week better off, it's always been £20, £25...it's no incentive, because like I'm on tablets, I've got to start paying for prescriptions [and] school meals ...'

(JSA main claimant, male)

Some very long-term JSA claimants thought that IWC and work compared somewhat unfavourably to participating in the New Deal and staying on benefits. Though only qualifying for an extra £15 a week, at the end of the programme they could return to benefits on the same basis of entitlement as before, something not possible with work:

'They're good, if you can get on them, courses...you don't have to sign on...and you [get] £15 [on top of benefits]...The courses have never offered a job at the end of it, so...you go back to signing on.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'[I've done] loads! I've done [New Deal provider] a couple of times and [New Deal provider]... it's four or five of these, and I've been to [local Further Education College] [to do] a bricklaying course...So I've been on quite a few [over] 18 years. I quite enjoy doing these courses... you get an extra £15 [and] you're out doing something.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

The feeling of vulnerability and a concern for the impact of any movement into work on household income and the family as a whole, was pervasive. In making the transition from benefits to work, couple parents needed to ensure they did not become trapped in low-income jobs with little chance of progression to higher pay. Simply being no worse off or only a little better off in work, was not enough for many couple parents. Most needed to be appreciably better off before they felt comfortable leaving the safety net of benefits:

'I've got to have a job that's fairly decent...like £200, £250 a week and then...Tax Credit on top... It's got to be worth my while coming off the dole.'

(IS main claimant, male)

Particularly for couples with high housing costs, earnings by one parent on the minimum wage were believed to be insufficient to support a home and family, even with WTC:

'I have to be careful...because the minimum wage won't cover this because the rent on here is £500 a month and if it's only me working with her doing that course you ain't going to cover it are you?'

(JSA partner, male)

The relatively high value of out-of-work benefits came as a surprise to some couples, particularly those whose previous earnings were low and those with larger families. Although financially worse off than when working, the difference was frequently not large. One unexpected consequence of this was to make such parents feel they would need to earn considerably more than they did before becoming unemployed, to make it worth their while moving off benefits:

'We're only finding ourselves slightly worse off than we were before...and if I got back into work...obviously all the other things you have to pay straight away and...it would have to be you know considerably more than I was earning before to be in the plus. .So I'd have to raise my expectations a bit if I was to go back to work.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

'It's a bit of a strange thing to say but working all those hours...we just had enough money to pay the bills and we now find ourselves more or less in the same situation.'

(JSA main claimant, male)

It was within this broader context that many parents viewed IWC. Regardless of any short-term boost in income which entitlement to IWC might offer, before risking leaving benefits, couple parents needed reassurance that jobs would sustain and earnings, whether singly or jointly, would be sufficient to cover the family's housing costs, utility bills and living expenses.

6.2 In Work Advisory Support

IWAS began life as In Work Support within the original ND+fLP pilots. It allowed advisers to maintain contact with lone parents who required additional support during the first 60 days after they had started work. The aim was to help prevent lone parents from returning to IS by providing continued support from an adviser to help resolve any difficulties and direct them towards other help where appropriate. IWAS was introduced in April 2008 in ND+fLP pilot areas and across all Jobcentre Plus London districts. It extended the period of assistance for up to 26 weeks after the start of work and to couple parents who had been on a New Deal programme or in receipt of benefit for 26 weeks or more.

Views on IWAS tended to replicate those made in respect of More Voluntary Contact (MVC) and also echoed the findings from previous evaluations – that IWAS simply formalised what LPAs routinely offered to any lone parent customer moving into work.⁴³

'That's something that really Lone Parent Advisers...provide anyway. It's just another name for what they do.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Nevertheless, this support was said to be invaluable while lone parents settled in to their new employment and grappled with issues related to finances, working arrangements and childcare.⁴⁴

Mainstream advisers were unfamiliar with the term IWAS and had limited experience of providing in-work support for their customers. Indeed, once a customer had been mandated for referral to an external provider (usually after 12 months of claiming benefits), advisers generally lost contact with them and would not often know that they had moved into work. ASMs did however, believe that if a customer contacted an adviser for help after starting work, they would not be refused, although it would not be recorded on the labour market information system as IWAS:

⁴³ Jenkins (2008) p 60; Hosain and Breen (2007) p 45.

⁴⁴ Hosain and Breen (2007) p 45.

'It's a lack of knowledge for [Mainstream advisers] but...I did talk to them about this yesterday... If somebody has gone into work and they've suddenly found there's a problem, the person they're going to get into touch with is the adviser they were seeing. So they will come back and it may not be under that particular heading as IWAS, but they will get support.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

Even among lone parents, take up of IWAS was said to be low. Pilot staff attributed this to lack of time. Pressure of work meant LPAs no longer proactively followed up their customers; while lone parents would often be too busy working to be able to re-establish contact unless a serious issue arose.

6.3 In Work Emergency Discretion Fund (IWEDF)

The In Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) was introduced in April 2005 in the original ND+fLP pilot areas. Its aim was to provide in-work financial help to lone parents to help them to meet unexpected costs which may crop up when they first start work and which might otherwise prompt a return to benefits. In April 2008, the IWEF was replaced by the IWEDF which is now available to lone parents nationally and to couple parents in NDP pilot areas. As with IWAS, the period during which working parents may access IWEDF has been extended from 13 to 26 weeks.

Previous evaluations noted the stringent eligibility criteria of IWEF which severely curtailed its usage.⁴⁵ A relaxation of eligibility rules was generally welcomed, but concerns about the possibility of inappropriate use tended to restrict usage. Advisers believed that lone parents hearing about IWEF might formulate 'opportunistic' emergencies and were reluctant to advertise its availability in advance of specific need. Instead lone parents were encouraged to re-contact their adviser if any emergency arose during the first few months of employment. Although such situations were said to arise infrequently, IWEF was considered by LPAs to be an important component of the ND+fLP offer which could, under certain circumstances, help some lone parents sustain work.

To date, take up of IWEDF has been low, even among lone parents.⁴⁶ Figures are not available for take up of IWEDF among main claimant or partner parents, but pilot staff believe it to be negligible. Partly this reflects the practice of restricting information about IWEDF until urgently needed, a practice which appeared to have been formalised in the intervening period:

'In Work Emergency Discretionary Fund, the advice that we got was not to...promote it...the only way that they'll know, the client...is if they've kept in contact with the adviser when they've gone into work, and...there's an emergency...and they phone up the adviser and the adviser knows about it, then they'll be able to access it. But we're not supposed to promote it.'

(Manager)

This message had been widely communicated to LPAs and, in both pilot areas, the policy of discretionary usage was well understood:

'You don't mention it actually at interviews, it's something we've been told you don't broadcast it but we just say to them when they come in, if you need help there's other measures we can take, so you've got to come back to the adviser.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

⁴⁵ Hosain and Breen (2007) p 62.

⁴⁶ Since being extended nationally to all lone parents, only 820 people had received funding by March 2009. Hansard Source: Citation: HC Deb, 11 November 2009, c583W.

Nevertheless, confusion remained over what IWEDF could be used for and the precise eligibility criteria, particularly for couple parents. Consequently advisers guarded against raising expectations unduly among customers:

'I'm still not clear as to at what stage of the claim that is available...you don't want to raise expectations to the customer because...of the qualifying period, waiting time....With the LPs it's slightly different...it could be from day one...as long as they're on NDLP...but with the mainstream ones...there is a qualifying period.'

(Lone Parent adviser)

Mainstream advisers and ASMs were, for the most part, largely unaware of IWEDF:

'[IWEDF] I don't think I've ever heard of that.'

(Advisory Services Manager)

A few advisers knew that partners could be eligible for IWEDF, but none were aware that mainstream claimant parents might be eligible too:

'The Emergency In Work Credit...I wasn't aware that that was available to couples with children...at no stage I was even aware of it...I know the partners for the unemployed, they're entitled to the same things that the lone parents can get.'

(Mainstream adviser)

Mainstream advisers in the non-London pilot generally had better knowledge and understanding of IWEDF, but take up among couple parents was said to be negligible. Only one adviser present at any of the focus groups had used the IWEDF for a couple parent. In this instance, the adviser had helped a partner into work, informing her that Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit would continue for the first four weeks of employment, only to find that, because her partner was the claimant, the couple were not eligible for benefit run on. IWEDF was used to pay rent and Council Tax in the period between the main claimant's benefits stopping and the partner's first wage packet.

6.4 Summary

6.4.1 In Work Advisory Support

- Mainstream advisers were unfamiliar with the term In Work Advisory Support and had limited experience of providing in work support for their customers; such advisers generally lost contact with customers following mandatory referral to an external provider.
- None of the couple parents interviewed were aware of IWAS or had taken it up.

6.4.2 In Work Emergency Discretion Fund

- Staff believed that take up of IWEDF among main claimant or partner parents was negligible, in large part a reflection of the widespread practice of restricting information about IWEDF until the point of need.
- None of the couple parents interviewed were aware of IWEDF or had taken it up.

6.4.3 In Work Credit

- In both case study areas, take up of IWC among couple parents was said by staff to be extremely low. A few partners were believed to have taken up IWC, but none of the staff interviewed had any experience of helping couple parents to access IWC.
- The stringent and complex eligibility criteria for IWC including the lengthy qualifying period of 12 months continuous receipt of benefit affecting both the main claimant and the partner was believed by staff to be a key reason for low take up (although these eligibility rules have since been relaxed).
- Which customers to tell about IWC, and when, was a dilemma for advisers. Informing customers too early in the claim could delay a return to work, while telling them too late could result in them missing out.
- Believing some customers may be little better off in work also made advisers reluctant to promote IWC for fear of overselling the benefits.
- None of the couple parents interviewed had taken up IWC and very few had heard of it before it was described to them by a researcher.
- Having been told about IWC during face-to-face interviews, many couple parents doubted whether being eligible for IWC would make any difference to the desirability or likelihood of them working.
- Among those actively seeking work, many questioned how eligibility for IWC could influence something they were doing anyway, viewing it as a bonus or short-term boost in income, rather than an incentive.
- Among those who were more undecided about work, some speculated that IWC might persuade them to take a lower paid job, part-time rather than full-time work, or to enable them to reduce the number of hours they needed to work.
- Particularly among couple parents on means-tested benefits, an extra £40 or £60 a week for a year was felt to be not enough to compensate for the long-term loss of benefits that moving into work was believed to entail.
- Some couple parents in London and those with high rents and mortgages to pay considered £40 or £60 a week to be a relatively insignificant amount compared with the financial outlay they would need to cover if they moved into work.
- Regardless of any short-term boost in income which IWC might offer, couple parents wanted jobs that would sustain and earnings sufficient to cover the family's important living expenses longer term, before risking leaving benefits.

7 Findings and policy implications

During a period of significant policy change and operational pressures within Jobcentre Plus, the ability of staff to respond to couple parents in the way envisaged through the pilot, and in the manner many would wish, appeared to have been seriously compromised. The evidence from this research suggests that the extension of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) did not offer couple parents a package of support on a par, or reasonably comparable with the support available to lone parents. Nor was there evidence from this research that any of the specific measures incorporated within the ND+fLP offer, including In Work Credit (IWC), had, at the time of the first phase research, any effect in encouraging couple parents to take up or sustain work, as anticipated.

There appears to be no single or clear-cut reason for this; rather, several factors seemed to be affecting both the implementation of the policy measures and their take up by couple parents at that time. The economic downturn and rapid pace of change in Jobcentre Plus had clearly strained the capacity of some Jobcentre Plus offices to deliver support through ND+fLP to couple parents on a consistent basis. Nevertheless, the evidence from the two case studies suggest that cultural, operational and policy design issues were of greater significance in explaining why many couple parent customers may have missed out on receiving appropriate support. Despite considerable efforts in one of the case study areas to implement the extension in the manner intended, there appeared to be equally low levels of awareness and take up of the measures among couple parents in that area, as in the other case study area. This seems to testify to those wider underlying issues.

7.1 Architecture and culture of delivery

A key part of the problem seemed to be a wider issue with Jobcentre Plus services in general and Welfare to Work programmes in particular continuing to be delivered according to benefit entitlement. How advisers engaged their customers, and the support they were able to offer, was primarily determined by the conditionality regime attendant on the benefit claimed. This had important implications for both staff and customers, as well as for the implementation of ND+fLP measures to couple parents.

Mainstream advisers were constrained by a mandatory set of rules which regulate the timing, structure and content of interventions, but also their working practices were strongly governed by an underlying ethos emphasising rapid job entry. In addition, Mainstream advisers typically lost contact with their customers at a relatively early stage in the back to work journey, having little or no feedback about their progress or success in finding employment. Customers with whom they no longer had contact are less likely to seek their assistance as they move into work, or in the early weeks of employment. Re-establishing contact was all the more improbable if customers are unaware of their eligibility for help or are reluctant to re-engage with Jobcentre Plus due to a previously unsatisfactory experience. Given that many of the ND+fLP measures offered support to parents once they were in work, this may in part explain the low levels of awareness and take up of the measures available to couple parents found in this research.

Lone Parent advisers, on the other hand, caseload their lone parent customers as a matter of routine, and remain in contact with them throughout both mandatory interventions and voluntary support, providing practical, hands-on assistance along the back to work journey and on into employment. The type of job, wage rate and the number of hours worked by the lone parent are

given consideration, along with any caring responsibilities, and any financial implications from a move into work. This would appear potentially to have been a more conducive model for promoting and delivering the measures that were available through ND+fLP.

The continuity and longevity of support, the type and amount of practical assistance provided and the degree of flexibility exercised regarding customers' job choices seem to be where the two approaches most clearly diverged. This suggests that the architecture and underlying ethos of service delivery to main claimant parents, in particular, where they are seen as job seekers first and foremost rather than parents, is thus fundamentally different to that which has applied historically to lone parents (although as the Lone Parent Obligation (LPO) initiative progresses, lone parents will increasingly be subject to the mainstream job seeking regime).

The ND+fLP pilots and the support measures they comprised were designed for lone parents in the context of a delivery model based on caseloading and flexible, customised, voluntary help. A key element of the success achieved to date with lone parents, both within the pilot, but also in terms of lone parent support more generally, can be attributed to the skills and experience of specialist advisers attuned to the particular needs of parents. It is not surprising, therefore, that where LPAs also assumed responsibility for supporting partners, they appear to have been able to engage with them more appropriately and readily as parents. Mainstream advisers, on the other hand, have struggled to engage with their customers as parents, a reflection of their different working practices, and of the very different delivery context within which these advisers operate.

This is a broader issue than the implementation and delivery of ND+fLP within individual Jobcentre Plus offices and suggests a more wide-ranging review of the aims and objectives of parent policy within Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) may be warranted.

7.2 Better off in work message

In spite of the greater expertise and involvement of LPAs and an evidently higher degree of priority afforded to the pilot outside of London, success in engaging couple parents, even here, proved elusive. Couple parents, it seems, had been equally unresponsive in both areas. While it is important not to underestimate the effect on take up of the relative newness of the measures, or of eligibility issues around IWC, the findings suggest that the specific measures and strategies which LPAs have successfully deployed in persuading lone parents to move off benefits, did not work so well with couples. Customer interviews also seemed to indicate that success with couple parents was unlikely to be achieved simply through extending eligibility. This suggests the need to think differently and specifically about what policies may work with couple parents, rather than assuming that what has worked with lone parents will also work with them.

What this research specifically appears to suggest is that the better off in work message so effectively communicated to and embraced by lone parents, may be a less persuasive tool when used with couple parents. A key reason may be due to the operation of the tax and benefits system when there are two parents rather than one parent present in the household. Particularly for couples on means-tested benefits and with larger families, the potential loss of benefits may be more significant to them than the likely gains from working, even with Working Tax Credit (WTC) and IWC factored in. The greater prevalence of homeownership among couple parents may also be relevant, since help with housing costs is only available to working families if they rent, rather than own, their own home. Couple parents, moreover, are unable to return to benefits voluntarily if a job or working arrangements turn out to be unsuitable, unlike lone parents claiming Income Support (IS) (particularly those with younger children). A concern to avoid becoming trapped in low paid work certainly appears to resonate more strongly for couples. For all these reasons, the disincentives to

work for couple parents, whether actual or perceived, seem to differ both in degree and in kind from those experienced by lone parents. These are important issues identified, but not fully explored, by this research and are, therefore, explored further in the final report from the research.

7.3 Possible policy and operational implications

The research also raises some issues at the policy level. Evidence shows that half of children in low income households live in families where at least one adult is in paid work.⁴⁷ Increasing parental employment is clearly an important priority in terms of meeting anti-poverty objectives, but research shows that the group with the highest risk of poverty among working families is children in couple families with one part time earner.⁴⁸ Children in couple families where both parents work (either one full time and one part-time, both full time, or both part time), on the other hand, have a much lower risk of poverty. However, while the benefits of dual earning are clear, current policy is aimed at encouraging one parent into work. This research has shown that targeting and encouraging partners to move into part-time work, as work-related discussions conducted within Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) (and with lone parents) often do, may not be effective without also considering the potential for the main claimant to move into work at the same time.

Policies designed to increase the labour market participation of individual couple parents also face a number of practical challenges given the interdependence between couple parents regarding their labour market intentions and transitions. This research has shown that the take up of work among partners is not only frequently predicated upon the movement into work of the main claimant, but also typically follows it. The current timing of WFIPs and of the partner's eligibility for help may, therefore, need re-considering, since work for the partner may only be desirable or feasible once the claiming parent has moved off benefits, at precisely the point their eligibility for help ceases. While the hope and expectation may be for the second parent to follow the first into work, as this research seems to indicate, the move is far from inevitable or automatic.

The very terms 'partner' parent, 'main claimant' parent, and indeed, 'lone parent,' may also be unhelpful given the assumptions such labels tend to reinforce about work intentions, and the kinds of approaches and help these labels entitle different categories of parents to. As the research has shown, while separately identified and engaged for the purposes of claiming benefits and eligibility for help, main claimant and partner parents (and indeed lone parents) can often be the same individuals at different points in time. Individualised approaches, moreover, fail to engage with the reality of joint work-related decision making within couples.

The Harker report recognised that family-focused help for all parents would require something of a cultural change to the way in which Jobcentre Plus operates, including a move away from a simple work first approach. Help to assist both parents in a couple find suitable work in tandem or in close succession, if that is what they want, would also require changes to policy and operational practice. Most obvious of these would be in supporting, or offering to support, couple parents together, rather than separately as is the case currently, and has been historically. Other possible changes might include revising the conditions and timescales of partner's eligibility for help; and reviewing the delivery, timing and frequency of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs), together with the content and delivery of Better Off Calculations (BOCs). At a time when Jobcentre Plus is undergoing further transformation, it is unclear how feasible such changes would be.

⁴⁷ DWP Households Below Average Income 2007/8; updated Aug 2009. This could be due to low pay, too few hours worked, or a combination of the two.

⁴⁸ HMT, DWP and DCSF (March 2008) *Ending Child Poverty: Everybody's Business*, strategy paper p18.

There are some important caveats to highlight. First is the timing of the first wave of research, coming only a year after the extension was implemented and in parallel with the introduction of a series of other important policies and services. The fieldwork was also conducted during a period when unprecedented demand for mainstream Jobcentre Plus services was diverting resources and attention away from lower priority activities. During the second period of fieldwork, there is an exploration of whether and how this situation changed given the stabilisation in the rise in registered unemployment.

Secondly, among the sample of parent customers, all but a small minority of partners were without work and claiming unemployment or incapacity benefits. Very few couple parents had heard of IWC and none had taken it up. Because of this, the second phase of research purposively sampled parents who had made the transition from benefits to work, including some who have accessed IWC and other ND+fLP measures.

Notwithstanding these qualifications, the evidence from this first phase of research suggested that it may be mistaken to assume that the circumstances of couple parents, the choices and constraints they can face and the support they might need in moving from benefits to work, will automatically be the same as those of lone parents simply because they have children. Responsibilities for and attitudes to childcare, housing costs, tax credits, work incentives and disincentives and what constitutes suitable working arrangements, can all be viewed quite differently and have different effects when there are two parents at home, rather than one.

This research raises some important issues about how best to support out of work and low income couples with children. The implication is that couple parent policy and delivery may benefit from re-visiting in some important respects. These issues are explored further during the second phase of the research and covered in the final report, together with specific recommendations, where appropriate, for moving forward.

Appendix A

Examples of topic guides

Evaluation of ND+fLP extension and related policies to couple parents

Main claimant Wave 1

Interview code

Does your fieldwork buddy know who you are interviewing and where?

Have you called Jo/the office today to tell them about any changes to your schedule?

Jobcentre Plus office/district

Date of interview

Name of researcher

Start time:

Finish time

Length of interview

Introduction

- Thank the participant for agreeing to talk to us.
- Introduce yourself and Insite – an independent research organisation
- Explain that Insite has been commissioned by DWP to ask Jobcentre Plus customers who are *parents*, what they know and how they feel about the support available to help parents access work or training.
- Tell them the interview should last approximately one hour.
- Explain that it is OK if they prefer not to answer some of the questions and they can stop the interview at any time if they wish.
- Confirm that they will receive a £15 cash gift as a thank you for taking part in the research and that this will not affect their benefits in any way.
- Ask if they have any questions.

Confidentiality and consent

- Explain that their responses will be anonymous and treated in confidence.
- Reassure them that their details will not be shared beyond researchers working on this project or passed onto any other person or organisation
- Explain that we need to record the interview as this helps us analyse the responses we get.

- Their name will not appear in any report and that any quotes used will not allow them to be identified.
- Ask them to sign the consent form.

Personal and household characteristics

1. Can you tell me how old you are?
2. How would you describe your ethnicity?
 - *White (British, Irish or Other)*
 - *Mixed (White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White & Asian or Other)*
 - *Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other)*
 - *Black or Black British (African, Caribbean, Other)*
 - *White (British, Irish or Other)*
 - *Mixed (White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White & Asian or Other)*
 - *Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other)*
 - *Black or Black British (African, Caribbean, Other)*
 - *Chinese, Other Ethnic Group*
 - *Prefer not to say*
3. What is your marital status?
 - *single – never married or cohabiting*
 - *married and living with spouse*
 - *married and separated from spouse*
 - *divorced*
 - *widowed*
 - *in a civil partnership*
4. How long have you been with your current partner?
Be aware that main claimant may not necessarily be the parent of any/all the dependent children, although we cannot address this issue directly.
5. How many children do you have and how old are they? Are they still at school/living at home?
Confirm age of the youngest child.
6. Do you have any health issues or a disability?
If yes, how does this affect you?
Do you get Disability Living Allowance?
7. Does your partner have any health issues or a disability?
If yes, how does this affect him/her?
Does he/she get Disability Living Allowance?
Do you get Carer's Allowance for him/her?

8. Do any of the children living at home have any health issues or disabilities?
*If yes, does the child concerned get Disability Living Allowance?
Do you (or your partner) get Carer's Allowance for him/her?*
9. Is there anyone else that you take care of or have responsibility for looking after?
Probe for whether they are a foster carer or care for a relative
10. Who else lives with you here in this house?
Probe for other adults and children.
11. Do you rent or own this house?
*If renting, is your landlord a housing association, the council or a private individual? How much is your rent per month? How much of this do you pay?
If owner occupier, how much is your mortgage every month and how much of this do you pay?
Do you have any insurance to cover the payments?*
12. How long have you lived in this area?
13. Do you have any family/friends living nearby?
If yes, do they help with childcare?
14. Do you or your partner have a full driving licence?
15. Does anyone in the household have a car?
16. Have you ever attended the local Children's Centre?
*If yes, when? how often? what services and help did/do you receive?
If no, do you know where your nearest Children's Centre is?*

Education, skills and employment history

17. How old were you when you left school?
18. Did you leave with any qualifications?
19. What did you do after you left school?
Prompt for (government) training courses, college/university course, job, had a family/children.
20. Have you taken part in any training or received any qualifications since leaving school/college/university?
Prompt for actual qualifications gained.
21. Do you feel you have any skill or training needs? Is there any training you would like to do?
If yes, what are these?
22. Do you have any problems with reading, writing or maths?
If yes, have you ever done a course/would you think of doing a course to help improve your skills?
23. Have you ever been on a New Deal programme or a training course organised by the Jobcentre?
If yes, which courses, when? Did you get a qualification?
24. Are you taking part in any courses, classes or training at the moment?
If yes, get details which courses, prompt for ESOL course if relevant.

25. What kind of work/jobs you have done since you left school? Prompt for:
- *full or part time jobs*
 - *temporary, casual or permanent*
 - *unskilled/skilled/professional*
 - *type of employer*
 - *wage/salary*
 - *circumstances under which the jobs finished/they left*
 - *overall pattern of working*
26. Since leaving school, would you say you have spent more time in work or more time out of work?
27. Is this pattern of work of your choosing (e.g. *they wanted to work part time or for a particular type of employer*), or not of your choosing (e.g. *could not to find suitable work*)?
28. What sort of jobs has your partner done since leaving school? Have they spent more time in work or more time out of work?

If respondent is female

29. Did you go out to work **before** the birth of your child/children?
30. Did you go out to work **after** the birth of your child/between the births of your children?
If yes
How long after having a baby did you go back to work?
Who looked after your child/children while you were at work?
How easy was/is it to combine work with being a mother?
If no
Was this a definite choice not to work (for example because you wanted to look after the children) or were there other reasons or difficulties involved with her working?

If respondent is male

31. Did your partner go out to work **before** the birth of her child/children?
32. Did she go out to work **after** the birth of her child/between the births of her children?
If yes
How long after having a baby did she go back to work?
Who looked after the child/children while she was at work?
If no
Was this a definite choice not to work (for example because she wanted to look after the children) or were there other reasons or difficulties involved with working?

Benefits and household income

33. Are you currently in paid work?
If yes, ask all of the following questions
- *What job? Probe for kind of job, responsibilities and workload.*
 - *How long have you been doing this job?*

- *How long were you out of work for, before getting this job?*
- *Do you like your job? Why, or why not?*
- *How many hours a week do you normally work? If part time, probe if they would consider increasing their hours in the future.*
- *What is your hourly rate of pay/weekly wage or salary?*

Reassure interviewee that they are not obliged to answer this question

- *How likely is it that you will get a pay rise or be promoted in the near future?*
- *How did they find/get this job?*
- *Have you received any training in your job? Is in-work training available?*
- *Did you get any support or financial help from a Jobcentre adviser?*
- *Who looks after the children when you are working?*
- *Do you get any help with childcare costs?*
- *How, if at all, has your work affected the children?*

If no, ask all of the following questions

- *Have you ever been in paid work? If no, what is the main reason for this?*
- *If yes, how long is it since you were last in paid work and what did you do previously?*
- *How long did you have your previous job for?*
- *Did you like your job? Why, or why not?*
- *How many hours a week did you normally work?*
- *What was your hourly rate of pay/weekly wage or salary?*

Reassure interviewee that they are not obliged to answer this question

- *What kind of work are you currently looking for?*
- *Is this the same kind of work you were doing previously?*
- *What would you say is the main reason why you are not currently working?*
- *What kind of difficulties are you having finding/getting work?*

Probe for skills/qualifications, lack of work experience, transport difficulties, lack of suitable jobs in the area, expensive or unsuitable childcare, the recession.

- *What kind of help would you find most useful in getting you back to work?*

34. Has the need to care for children ever limited your ability to go out to work, for example by restricting the kind of work you can do/did, or the number of hours you were/are able to work? (either currently or in the past e.g. when the children were younger)
35. Has the difficulty of finding or paying for suitable childcare ever stopped you or your partner from going out to work or looking for a job, or are other reasons more important?
If yes, probe.

36. Is your partner working at the moment?

If yes

- *What job?*
- *How long have they been doing this job?*
- *How many hours a week do they normally work?*
- *What is their hourly rate of pay/weekly wage or salary?*

Reassure interviewee that they are not obliged to answer this question

- *How did they find/get this job?*
- *Did they have any help from a Jobcentre adviser?*

If no

- *When was the last time they were in work/had a job?*
- *How many hours a week did they normally work?*
- *What was their hourly rate of pay/weekly wage or salary?*
- *Are they currently looking for or interested in working?*

37. Is anyone else in the household working?

38. What is the family's main source of income at the present time?

Probe for benefits/wages by individual family members.

39. Could you tell me which benefits the family is getting and who is claiming them? *Probe: to include JSA, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit.*

40. Is your partner getting any benefits in her/his own right?

Probe for Carer's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Disability Living Allowance, Employment Support Allowance etc.

41. Has he/she ever claimed benefits as a lone parent in the past? If so, what were the circumstances?

42. Are you getting Child Tax Credit for the child/children living with you?

If no: have you heard of it? why are you not claiming it?

43. How much does the family get to live on each week/month? Does this include help with housing costs (rent, council tax, mortgage)?

44. How does this income compare with when you (and/or your partner) were working (in the past)? Is it more or less or about the same (*taking into account housing costs, for example*)?

45. Is it more or less than you what you could earn now by working? By how much?

Clarify whether this is one or both parents working full time or part time.

46. To what extent has the recession/the economic downturn affected you/your family and your household income?

47. Do you have any concerns about moving from benefits into work? If so, what worries you most?

48. How easy or difficult do you think it will be to find a job paying enough to support you and your family?

Attitudes to parenting and working

(N.B If the child is/children are older and no longer in need of looking after, please amend the wording/tenses to talk about their former attitudes towards work and parenting)

49. In a couple with children, such as yourselves, who do you think should work, ideally and why?
One male breadwinner? Stay at home mother? Dual earners?
50. Who do you think should look after the children ideally, and why?
51. In practice, how are decisions made between you and your partner about who goes out to work and who looks after the children? What sort of factors do you take into account?
52. How much would it be an individual decision and how much a joint decision with your partner?
53. How do you feel about working when you have responsibilities for bringing up children? What are the positives and what are the negatives?
54. How do you feel about claiming benefits/being out of work with children at home? What are the positives and what are the negatives?
55. What do you feel would be the ideal situation for your family in terms of who goes out to work? Why do you feel this?
56. Have you thought about/discussed the possibility of your partner going out to work instead of you?
57. What do you feel about the possibility of your partner working?
58. (If relevant) Would you be happy to look after the children if he/she went out to work?
59. (If relevant) Would your partner be happy for you to look after the children if he/she went out to work?
60. If your partner went out to work and you stayed at home, would you be better off or worse off financially than you are now on benefits?
61. Do you think both of you manage to go out to work, or would it be possible for only one of you? *If only one, why do you feel it's not possible/difficult for both of you to work?*
Ask them to consider some scenarios based on their current circumstance.....
What about if both of you worked full time, would that be possible?
What about if both of you worked part time?
What about if one worked full time and one worked part time?
Explore the sorts of issues each different scenario would raise based on their current circumstances and the ages of the children
62. Do you think you would be better off or worse off financially if both of you went to work (instead of only one)?
Do they have a full grasp of the financial implications of one or both working taking into account the possible need to access childcare?

Attitudes to childcare

(N.B If the child/children are older and no longer in need of looking after, please amend the wording/tenses to talk about their former attitudes towards childcare)

63. Does anyone other than yourself and your partner ever take care of the children?

If yes

- *Who?*
- *Formal or informal care?*
- *Under what circumstances?*
- *Are you happy with these arrangements?*

If no

- *Is there any particular reason why?*

64. Who would look after/looks after the children if/when you go out to work?

65. How old would the youngest child need to be before you would feel comfortable with the idea of going out to work? OR

How old was the youngest child before you felt comfortable with the idea of going out to work?

66. What are your views on formal childcare, in other words, paying someone to look after the children, for example to enable your partner to go out to work (if he/she is not currently working)?

67. Are you currently using any kind of childcare? Have you ever used formal childcare in the past?

If yes to either

- *What type of childcare? formal or informal?*
- *When and where accessed?*
- *Why are they using it? To allow them to go to work? If not, would they ever consider using it to enable them to go out to work?*
- *Do they have to pay for it? Is so how do they pay? Do they get any financial help?*
- *What is their experience of the childcare?*
- *How much does/did it cost?*
- *How affordable is/was it?*
- *How appropriate is/was it to the child's needs? (is the child disabled?)*
- *How appropriate is/was it to the parents/child's culture or religion?*

If no

- *What would you say are the main reasons why you do not use childcare?*
- *Prompt for affordability, availability, accessibility, no need for it, personal preference, cultural/religious factors etc.*
- *Under what circumstances might you consider using formal childcare?*
- *Would you ever consider using formal childcare to enable you to go out to work?*

Awareness and take up of New Deal Plus and parent specific measures

68. What kind of contact do you currently have with the Jobcentre?
Probe for fortnightly signing on, adviser meetings at 13, 26 weeks, Work Focused Interview, New Deal/caseloaded meetings and voluntary contact – to use Jobpoints for example.
69. What kind of contact have you had with the Jobcentre in the past?
*Do they have a lengthy history of contact or is the recent contact new?
Have they ever previously been a ‘dependent partner’ or claimed IS as lone parent?*
70. How do you feel about going into the Jobcentre?
71. Have you ever been sanctioned or had your benefits reduced or stopped, for whatever reason?
If yes, what were the circumstances/reason? When was this?
72. In the past year, approximately how many times have you seen an adviser who is specifically there to help you find work? *(be careful to differentiate adviser role from fortnightly signing on process)*
73. Would you normally see the same adviser or is it someone different each time?
74. Did you see someone when you had been signing on for 26 weeks/6 months? Can you remember what happened/what you talked about?
75. Did you see someone when you had been signing on for 13 weeks/3 months? Can you remember what happened/what you talked about?
76. Has anyone asked you about the number and ages of the children you have at home and if you have any problems getting to work because of the children?
77. Does your partner ever go to the Jobcentre?
78. Has she/he ever been required to attend an appointment with an adviser?
Probe for attendance at mandatory WFIPs.
79. Has she/he ever missed or forgotten to attend an appointment?
If yes, what happened as a result? Were you sanctioned or did you have your benefits reduced or stopped?
80. Have you ever attended any Jobcentre appointments with your partner? Were you seen as a couple?
*If yes, why did you attend as a couple?
Whose suggestion was this – yours or your advisers?
Did your partner attend your appointment or did you attend his/hers?
Were you dealt with as a couple or as an individual?
What did you discuss? Did you find this useful?
If no, why not? Would you like/found it useful to have attended as a couple?*
81. When was the last time you were at the Jobcentre? Was it during the meeting we observed or have you been back since?
Make sure to differentiate between fortnightly signing and seeing an adviser for a longer meeting/appointment
82. What sorts of things did you discuss at the meeting(s) you (have) had with your adviser?

83. Have you been told about the support that is available to help parents such as yourself to move into work?
If yes, who told you this?
How useful did you find this information?
Have you ever taken up any offer of help?
If no, would such information be of any use to you?
84. Has anyone ever spoken about the help available to your partner?
If yes, who told you this?
How useful did you find this information?
If no, would such information be of any use to you?
85. Has your adviser mentioned that he/she is available to help you at any time between fixed appointments? (More Voluntary Contact)
86. Have you ever taken up the offer of this help?
If yes, probe for whether such meetings were useful or not.
87. Has your adviser mentioned the possibility of you (and your partner) attending an event to explore career paths and address barriers to work? (Discovery Events)
88. Have you ever been invited to such an event?
If yes
Did you attend the event?
If yes, who attended – dependent partner only or with main claimant?
What sorts of things were you told about?
How useful did you find it?
If no
Is there any particular reason why?
If no
If you were to be invited, do you think you may be interested in going?
89. Has your adviser ever discussed with you the different kinds of childcare assistance which you or your partner may be eligible for, for example help to arrange or pay for childcare?
If yes, what sort of help is available? Do you know if you may be eligible for this help?
Prompt for
- *to contribute up to 80 per cent of childcare costs if you and your partner both work 16 hours or more (Childcare element of Working Tax Credits).*
 - *to help pay for childcare in the week before your partner starts work? (Childcare Assist).*
 - *to help pay for childcare if your partner works part-time up to 16 hours per week (Childcare Subsidy).*
 - *to help pay for childcare when attending job interviews or training.*
 - *to help pay for up-front childcare costs such as deposits and registration fees (ADF?).*
 - *help from sources other than the Jobcentre, for example the local authority, a Children's or Family Centre.*
90. Have you ever taken up or considered taking up this help?
If yes, under what circumstances might you/did you take it up? How useful was it?
If no, why not?

91. Have you ever been offered help with finding or paying for a training course? (Flexible Provision)

If yes

- Did you take up the offer?
- What sort of course/training did you do?
- Was the course/training generally available or did your adviser help with paying for a specialist course just for you?

Probe for whether the customer has any notion of whether this was paid for with flexible provision funding or was available as standard New Deal programme provision.

- How useful was it?
- Did it help you to get a job?

If no

- Are there any courses or training you would interested in doing?
- Would this help you to get a job?
- Have you discussed this possibility with your adviser?

92. Did she/he mention that the help can continue even after you (or your partner) move into work? (IWAS, IWEDF)

93. Have you ever received any support from a Jobcentre Plus adviser when you were working? Was it useful? (IWAS)

94. Have you or your partner ever received any payments from your adviser to help deal with any financial emergencies while you've been working?

If yes, what was the payment needed for? Could you have continued working if you had not received this payment?

95. Did your adviser ever mention, or have you heard of something called, In Work Credit? Have you ever received it?

Prompt for a tax free bonus of £40 (Dudley & Sandwell)/£60 (London) paid on top of your wages for a year for work of 24 hours per week or more. Be careful to distinguish between this and (childcare element of) Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit, and that they clearly understand the difference.

If yes, but they have not taken it up, ask the following questions

- Who told you/how did you find out about In Work Credit – Personal Adviser, other member of staff (who?) or other person (friend or family member?)?
- When were you told/did you find out? What were the circumstances? Was it during an adviser meeting? Before or after starting work? When you ended your claim for benefit?
- What do you know about In Work Credit?
- What do you think about it?
- Do you know that you may be eligible to receive it?
- Does it make you think more positively about the possibility of working?
- If not, why not? Do they have concerns about the 52 week time limit/over-payment?
- Is £40 (Dudley & Sandwell)/£60(London) enough?

- *Did you know that your partner might be eligible to receive In Work Credit instead of you?*
- *Would getting this amount make any difference to whether or not you or your partner went out to work?*
- *If not, why not?*
- *Would it make any difference if both you and your partner got a £40/£60 weekly bonus for a year?*

If yes, and they have taken it up, ask the following questions

- *Who told you/how did you find out about In Work Credit – Personal Adviser, other member of staff (who?) or other person (friend or family member?)?*
- *When were you told/did you find out? What were the circumstances? Was it during an adviser meeting? Before or after starting work? When you ended your claim for benefit?*
- *What do you think about it?*
- *Did it play any part in encouraging you to go out to work?*
- *Who processed your application?*
- *Were there any problems?*
- *What difference did getting it make?*
- *What did you use it for?*
- *How long did you receive/have you been receiving the credit for?*
Are you still getting it?
If not, why not? How did you manage financially after it stopped?
- *Did you have to pay any of the credit back because of an over-payment?*

If yes, and partner has taken it up, ask the following questions

- *Who told you/how did you find out about In Work Credit – Personal Adviser, other member of staff (who?) or other person (friend or family member?)?*
- *When were you told/did you find out? What were the circumstances? Was it during an adviser meeting? Before or after starting work? When you ended your claim for benefit?*
- *Did it play any part in encouraging them to go out to work?*
- *What difference did getting it make to your household income?*
- *What was the extra money used for?*
- *How long did they receive/have they been receiving the credit for?*
Are they still getting it?
If not, why not? How did you manage financially after it stopped?
- *Did you have to pay any of the credit back because of an over-payment?*

If no, they've not heard of it, ask the following questions

- *What do you think about such a credit?*
- *Does it make you think more positively about the possibility of working?*
- *If not, why not?*

- *Would getting it make any difference to whether or not you went out to work?
If yes, how? What would you use it for?
If not, why not?*
 - *Is £40 (Dudley & Sandwell)/£60(London) enough?*
 - *Did you know that your partner might be eligible to receive In Work Credit instead of you?*
 - *Would getting this amount make any difference to whether or not you or your partner went out to work?
If not, why not?*
 - *Would it make any difference if both you and your partner each got a £40/£60 weekly bonus for a year?*
96. Has your adviser ever done a ‘better off calculation’ to see how much better off you would be in work?
*If yes, how much better off would you be? What did you feel about this? Was it sufficient?
Did he/she include In Work Credit in the calculation? (be careful to differentiate this from WTC)
Did he/she include the possibility of your partner working in the calculation?
If no, would you find this useful?*
97. Have you ever received any leaflets or booklets about the help available to parents who are moving into work or thinking about work? (Marketing)
*If yes, where did you get the leaflet/information from?
What sort of information was included? Check whether New Deal Plus and related policies included in the information.
Do you have a copy to hand? Could we have a look?
How useful did you find the information?*
98. Do you feel you have had sufficient information and advice about the support and financial help available to help parents into work?
*If yes, what do you think about the help available?
If no, would you like to have more information and advice?*
99. Are there any gaps in the help on offer, or any problems that you are aware of?
100. Do you have any suggestions for other types of help or how support for parents through the Jobcentre could be improved?
101. Do you have any questions or anything you would like to add that we’ve not mentioned so far?
102. We would like to contact you in about six months time to do a follow up interview, would this be OK?
103. Do you think you will be working/in a job in six months time? What about your partner?

Thank you very much for your time. Your contribution is much appreciated.

Ensure you give respondent their cash gift.

Text or phone your fieldwork buddy to let them know your interview is finished and you have safely left the house.

Evaluation of ND+fLP extension and related policies to couple parents

Dependent partner Wave 1

Interview code

Does your fieldwork buddy know who you are interviewing and where?

Have you called Jo/the office today to tell them about any changes to your schedule?

Jobcentre Plus office/district

Date of interview

Name of researcher

Start time:

Finish time

Length of interview

Introduction

- Thank the participant for agreeing to talk to us.
- Introduce yourself and Insite – an independent research organisation.
- Explain that Insite has been commissioned by DWP to ask Jobcentre Plus customers who are parents what they know and how they feel about the support available to help *parents* access work or training.
- Tell them the interview should last approximately one hour.
- Explain that it is OK if they prefer not to answer some of the questions and they can stop the interview at any time if they wish.
- Confirm that they will receive a £15 cash gift as a thank you for taking part in the research and that this will not affect their benefits in any way.
- Ask if they have any questions.

Confidentiality and consent

- Explain that their responses will be anonymous and treated in confidence.
- Reassure them that their details will not be shared beyond researchers working on this project or passed onto any other person or organisation.
- Explain that we need to record the interview as this helps us analyse the responses we get.
- Their name will not appear in any report and that any quotes used will not allow them to be identified.
- Ask them to sign the consent form.

Personal and household characteristics

1. Can you tell me how old you are?
2. How would you describe your ethnicity?
 - *White (British, Irish or Other),*
 - *Mixed (White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White & Asian or Other)*
 - *Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other),*
 - *Black or Black British (African, Caribbean, Other)*
 - *White (British, Irish or Other),*
 - *Mixed (White & Black Caribbean, White & Black African, White & Asian or Other)*
 - *Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or other),*
 - *Black or Black British (African, Caribbean, Other)*
 - *Chinese, Other Ethnic Group ,*
 - *Prefer not to say*
3. Is English your first language?
If no, what is your first language? How well do you speak English, do you read and write English?
4. What is your marital status?
 - *single – never married or cohabiting*
 - *married and living with spouse*
 - *married and separated from spouse*
 - *divorced*
 - *widowed*
 - *in a civil partnership*
5. How long have you been with your current partner?
Be aware that current partner may not necessarily be the father of any/all dependent children, although we cannot address this issue directly.
6. How many children do you have and how old are they? Are they still at school/living at home?
Confirm age of the youngest child.
7. Do you have any health issues or a disability?
If yes, how does this affect you?
Do you get Disability Living Allowance?
8. Does your partner have any health issues or a disability?
If yes, how does this affect him/her?
Does he/she get Disability Living Allowance?
Do you get Carer's Allowance for him?
9. Do any of your children have any health issues or disabilities?
If yes, does the child concerned get Disability Living Allowance?
Do you (or your partner) get Carer's Allowance for him/her?

10. Is there anyone else that you take care of or have responsibility for looking after?
Probe for whether they are a foster carer or care for a relative.
11. Who else lives with you here in this house?
Probe for other adults and children.
12. Do you rent or own this house?
If renting, is your landlord a housing association, the council or a private individual? How much is your rent per month? How much of this do you pay?
If owner occupier, how much is your mortgage every month and how much of this do you pay?
Do you have any insurance to cover the payments?
13. How long have you lived in this area?
14. Do you have any family/friends living nearby?
If yes, do they help with childcare?
15. Do you or your partner have a full driving licence?
16. Does anyone in the household have a car?
17. Have you ever attended the local Children's Centre?
If yes, when? how often? what services and help did/do you receive?
If no, do you know where your nearest Children's Centre is?

Education, skills and employment history

18. How old were you when you left school?
19. Did you leave with any qualifications?
20. What did you do after you left school?
Prompt for (government) training courses, college/university course, job, had a family/children.
21. Have you taken part in any training or received any qualifications since leaving school/college/university?
Prompt for actual qualifications gained.
22. Do you feel you have any skill or training needs? Is there any training you would like to do?
If yes, what are these?
23. Do you have any problems with reading, writing or maths?
If yes, have you ever done a course/would you think of doing a course to help improve your skills?
24. Have you ever been on a New Deal programme or a training course organised by the Jobcentre?
If yes, which courses, when? Did you get a qualification?
25. Are you taking part in any courses, classes or training at the moment?
If yes, get details which courses, prompt for ESOL course if relevant.
26. What kind of work/jobs you have done since you left school? Prompt for:
 - full or part time jobs
 - temporary, casual or permanent
 - unskilled/skilled/professional

- *type of employer*
 - *wage/salary*
 - *circumstances under which the jobs finished/they left*
 - *overall pattern of working*
27. Since leaving school, would you say you have spent more time in work or more time out of work?
28. Is this pattern of work of your choosing (e.g. *they wanted to work part-time or stay home to look after the children*), or not of your choosing (e.g. *because they could not to find suitable work or afford childcare*)?
29. What sort of jobs has your partner done since leaving school? Have they spent more time in work or more time out of work?

If respondent is female

30. Did you go out to work **before** the birth of your child/children?
31. Did you go out to work **after** the birth of your child/between the births of your children?

If yes

How long after having a baby did you go back to work?

Who looked after your child/children while you were at work?

How easy was/is it to combine work with being a mother?

If no

Was this a definite choice not to work (for example because you wanted to look after the children) or were there other reasons or difficulties involved with her working?

If respondent is male

32. Did your partner go out to work **before** the birth of her child/children?
33. Did she go out to work **after** the birth of her child/between the births of her children?

If yes

How long after having a baby did she go back to work?

Who looked after the child/children while she was at work?

If no

Was this a definite choice not to work (for example because she wanted to look after her children) or were there other reasons or difficulties involved with working?

Benefits and household income

34. Are you currently in paid work?

If yes, ask all of the following questions

- *What job? Probe for kind of job, responsibilities and workload.*
- *How long have you been doing this job?*
- *Do you like your job? Why, or why not?*

- How many hours a week do you normally work? If part time, probe if they would consider increasing their hours in the future.
- What is your hourly rate of pay/weekly wage or salary?

Reassure interviewee that they are not obliged to answer this question

- How likely is it that you will get a pay rise or be promoted in the near future?
- How did they find/get this job?
- Have you received any training in your job? Is in-work training available?
- Did you get any support or financial help from a Jobcentre adviser?
- Who looks after the children when you are working?
- How, if at all, has your work affected your children?
- Do you get any help with childcare costs?

If no, ask all of the following questions

- Have you ever been in paid work? If no, what is the main reason for this?
- If yes, How long is it since you were last in paid work and what did you do previously?
- How long did you have your previous job for?
- Did you like your job? Why, or why not?
- How many hours a week did you normally work?
- What was your hourly rate of pay/weekly wage or salary?

Reassure interviewee that they are not obliged to answer this question

- What would you say are the main reason why you are not currently working/have never worked?
- Is there anything that makes it particularly difficult for you to work?

Probe for skills/qualifications, lack of work experience, transport difficulties, lack of suitable jobs in the area, expensive or unsuitable childcare, the recession.

- Are you currently looking for work?
*If yes, for how long have you been looking, what sort of work are you looking for?
What kind of help would you find most useful in helping you get into work?
If no, would you like to work?
Do you think you might be interested in going out to work in the future?*

35. Has the need to care for children ever limited your ability to go out to work, for example by restricting the kind of work you can do/did, or the number of hours you were/are able to work? (either currently or in the past e.g. when the children were younger)
36. Has the difficulty of finding or paying for suitable childcare ever stopped you or your partner from going out to work or looking for a job, or are other reasons more important?

37. Is your partner working at the moment?

If yes

- *What job?*
- *How long have they been doing this job?*
- *How many hours a week do they normally work?*
- *What is their hourly rate of pay/weekly wage or salary?*

Reassure interviewee that they are not obliged to answer this question

- *How did they find/get this job?*
- *Did they have any help from a Jobcentre adviser?*

38. Is anyone else in the household working?

39. What is the family's main source of income at the present time?

Probe for benefits/wages by individual family members.

40. Could you tell me which benefits the family is getting, and which person is claiming them?

Probe: to include JSA, Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit.

41. Are you currently getting any benefits in your own right?

Probe for Carers Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Employment Support Allowance, Disability Living Allowance etc.

42. Have to ever claimed benefits in your own right the past?

If yes, which benefits and when? Probe for whether they have previously claimed as a lone parent.

43. Are you getting Child Tax Credit for the child/children living with you?

If no: have you heard of it? why are you not claiming it?

44. How much does the family get to live on each week/month? Does this include help with housing costs (rent, council tax, mortgage)?

45. How does this income compare with when your partner (and you) were working (in the past)?

Is it more or less or about the same (taking into account housing costs, for example)?

Clarify whether this is one or both parents working full time or part time.

46. Is it more or less than you what your partner (and/or you) could earn now by working? By how much?

Clarify whether this is one or both parents working full time or part time.

47. To what extent has the recession/the economic downturn affected you/your family and your household income?

48. Do you have any concerns about your partner moving from benefits into work? If so, what worries you most?

49. How optimistic are you that your partner will be able to find a job paying enough to support you and your family?

Attitudes to parenting and working

(If the children are older and no longer in need of looking after, please amend the wording/tenses to talk about their former attitudes towards work and parenting)

50. In a couple with children, such as yourselves, who do you think should work, ideally and why?
One male breadwinner? Stay at home mother? Dual earners?
51. Who do you think should look after the children ideally, and why?
52. In practice, how are decisions made between you and your partner about who goes out to work and who looks after the children? What sort of factors do you take into account?
53. How much would it be an individual decision and how much a joint decision with your partner?
54. How do you feel about working when you have responsibilities for bringing up children? What are the positives and what are the negatives?
55. How do you feel about claiming benefits/being out of work with children at home? What are the positives and what are the negatives?
56. What do you feel would be the ideal situation for your family in terms of who goes out to work? Why do you feel this?
57. Have you thought about/discussed the possibility of you going out to work instead of your partner?
58. What does your partner feel about (the possibility of) you working?
59. (If relevant) Would your partner be happy to look after the children if you went out to work?
60. (If relevant) Would you be happy for your partner to look after the children if you went out to work?
61. If you went out to work and your partner stayed at home, would you be better off or worse off financially than you are now on benefits?
62. Have you thought about or discussed the possibility of both you and your partner going out to work?
63. Do you think both of you would manage to go out to work, or would it be possible for only one of you? *If only one, why do you feel it's not possible/difficult for both of you to work? Ask them to consider some scenarios based on their current circumstance.....*
What about if both of you worked full time, would that be possible?
What about if both of you worked part time?
What about if one worked full time and one worked part time?
What sort of issues would this raise?
Explore the sorts of issues each different scenario would raise based on their current circumstances and the ages of the children.
64. Do you think you would be better off or worse off financially if both of you went to work (instead of one)?
Do they have a full grasp of the financial implications of one or both working taking into account the possible need to access childcare?

Attitudes to childcare

(N.B If the child/children are older and no longer in need of looking after, please amend the wording/tenses to talk about their former attitudes towards childcare)

65. Does anyone other than yourself and your partner ever take care of the children?

If yes

- *Who?*
- *Formal or informal care?*
- *Under what circumstances?*
- *Are you happy with these arrangements?*

If no

- *Is there any particular reason why?*

66. Who would look after the children if you went out to work?/Who looks after the children when you go out to work?

67. How old would the youngest child need to be before you would feel comfortable with the idea of going out to work? OR
How old was the youngest child before you felt comfortable with the idea of going out to work?

68. What are your views on formal childcare, in other words, paying someone to look after your children, for example to enable you to go out to work?

69. Are you currently using any kind of childcare? Have you ever used it in the past?

If yes to either

- *What type of childcare? formal or informal?*
- *When and where accessed?*
- *Why are they using it? To allow them to go to work? If not, would they ever consider using it to enable them to go out to work?*
- *Do they have to pay for it? Is so how do they pay? Do they get any financial help?*
- *What is their experience of the childcare?*
- *How much does/did it cost?*
- *How affordable is/was it?*
- *How appropriate is/was it to the child's needs? (is the child disabled?)*
- *How appropriate is/was it to the parents/child's culture or religion?*

If no

- *What would you say are the main reasons why you do not use childcare?*
- *Prompt for affordability, availability, accessibility, no need for it, personal preference, cultural/religious factors etc.*
- *Under what circumstances might you consider using formal childcare?*
- *Would you ever consider using formal childcare to enable you to go out to work?*

Awareness and take up of New Deal Plus and parent specific measures

70. What kind of contact have you recently had/do you currently have with the Jobcentre?
When, what for? Was it for a mandatory WFIP appointment (one off or 6 monthly?) or did they approach the Jobcentre voluntarily?
71. What kind of contact have you had with the Jobcentre in the past?
*Do they have a history of contact or was the recent contact new?
Were they previously claiming IS as a lone parent/attend lone parent WFIs?*
72. How do you feel about going into the Jobcentre?
73. In the past year, approximately how many times have you seen an adviser, and over what period of time?
74. Have you ever missed or forgotten to attend an appointment?
If yes, what were the circumstances? What happened as a result?
75. Has your partner ever had his benefits reduced or stopped because you missed an appointment?
76. How often does your partner go to the Jobcentre?
If partner is on JSA, probe regarding signing on, review and New Deal meetings.
77. Have you ever attended any Jobcentre appointments with your partner?
*If yes, why did you attend as a couple?
Whose suggestion was this – yours or your advisers?
Did your partner attend your appointment or did you attend his/hers?
Were you dealt with as a couple or as an individual?
If not, why not? Would you like/found it useful to have attended as a couple?
What did you discuss? Did you find this useful?*
78. When was the last time you met with an adviser at a Jobcentre? (if appropriate) Was it during the meeting we observed or have you been back since?
79. What sorts of things did you discuss at the meeting(s) you have had with your adviser?
80. Have you been asked about the number and ages of your children and whether you have any problems with paying for or finding suitable childcare?
81. Did your adviser tell you about the support and financial assistance that is available specifically to help parents such as yourself to move into work?
*If yes, how useful did you find this information?
Have you ever taken up any offer of help?
If no, would such information be of any use to you?*
82. Did your adviser ever mention the help available to your partner?
*If yes, how useful did you find this information? Did your partner take up the offer of help?
If no, would such information be of any use to you?*
83. Did your adviser mention that he/she is available to help you at any time between fixed appointments? (More Voluntary Contact)
84. Have you ever taken up the offer of this help?
If yes, probe on whether such meetings were useful or not.

85. Did your adviser mention the possibility of you (and your partner) attending an event to explore career paths and address barriers to work? (Discovery Events)
86. Have you ever been invited to such an event?
If yes, Did you attend the event?
If yes, who attended – dependent partner only or with main claimant?
What sorts of things were you told about?
How useful did you find it?
If no
Is there any particular reason why?
If no If you were to be invited, do you think you may be interested in going?
87. Have you heard of, or did your adviser ever mention the New Deal programme?
If yes, what can you tell me about it?
Have you ever taken part?/Have you ever considered taking part?
88. Did your adviser ever discuss with you the different kinds of childcare assistance which you or your partner may be eligible for, for example help to arrange or pay for childcare?
If yes, what sort of help is available? Do you know if you may be eligible for this help?
Prompt for
- to contribute up to 80 per cent of childcare costs if you and your partner both work 16 hours or more (**Childcare element of Working Tax Credits**)
 - to help pay for childcare in the week before you start work? (**Childcare Assist**)
 - to help pay for childcare if you work part-time up to 16 hours per week (**Childcare Subsidy**)
 - to help pay for childcare when attending job interviews or training
 - to help pay for up-front childcare costs such as deposits and registration fees (ADF?)
 - help from sources other than the Jobcentre, for example the local authority, a Children’s or Family Centre
89. Have you ever taken up or considered taking up this help?
If yes, under what circumstances might you/did you take it up? How useful was it?
If no, why not?
90. Have you ever been offered help with finding or paying for a training course? (Flexible Provision)
If yes
- Did you take up the offer?
 - What sort of course/training did you do?
 - Was the course/training generally available or did your adviser help with paying for a specialist course just for you?
- Probe for whether the customer has any notion of whether this was paid for with flexible provision funding or was available as standard New Deal programme provision.*
- How useful was it?
 - Did it help you to get a job?

If no

- Are there any courses or training you would interested in doing?
- Would this help you to get a job?
- Have you discussed this possibility with your adviser?

91. Did he/she mention that the help can continue even after you (or your partner) move into work? (IWAS, IWEDF)
92. Have you or your partner ever received any support from a Jobcentre Plus adviser when you or they were working? Was it useful? (IWAS)
93. Have you or your partner ever received any payments from your adviser to help deal with any financial emergencies whilst you've been working?
If yes, what was the payment needed for? Could you have continued working if you had not received this payment?
94. Did your adviser ever mention, or have you heard of something called, In Work Credit? Have you ever received it?
Prompt for a tax free bonus of £40 (Dudley & Sandwell) £60 (London) paid on top of your wages for a year for work of 24 hours per week or more. Be careful to distinguish between this and (childcare element of) Working Tax Credit or Child Tax Credit, and that they clearly understand the difference.

If yes, but they have not taken it up, ask the following questions

- Who told you/how did you find out about In Work Credit – Personal Adviser, other member of staff (who?) or other person (friend or family member?)?
- When were you told/did you find out? What were the circumstances? Was it during an adviser meeting? Before or after starting work? When you ended your claim for benefit?
- What do you think about it?
- Do you know that you may be eligible to receive it?
- Does it make you think more positively about the possibility of working?
- If not, why not? Do they have concerns about the 52 week time limit/over-payment?
- Is £40 (Dudley & Sandwell)/£60(London) enough?
- Did you know that your partner might be eligible to receive In Work Credit instead of you?
- Would getting this amount make any difference to whether or not you or your partner went out to work?
- If not, why not
- Would it make any difference if both you and your partner got a £40/£60 weekly bonus for a year?

If yes, and they have taken it up, ask the following questions

- Who told you/how did you find out about In Work Credit – Personal Adviser, other member of staff (who?) or other person (friend or family member?)?
- When were you told/did you find out? What were the circumstances? Was it during an adviser meeting? Before or after starting work? When you ended your claim for benefit?

- *Did you know about it before you got a job?*
- *What do you think about it?*
- *Did it play any part in encouraging you to go out to work?*
- *Who processed your application?*
- *Were there any problems?*
- *What difference did getting it make?*
- *What did you use it for?*
- *How long did you receive/have you been receiving the credit for?*

Are you still getting it?

If not, why not? How did you manage financially after it stopped?

- *Did you have to pay any of the credit back because of an overpayment?*

If yes, and partner has taken it up, ask the following questions

- *Who told them/how did they find out about In Work Credit – Personal Adviser, other member of staff (who?) or other person (friend or family member?)?*
 - *When were they told/did they find out? What were the circumstances? Was it during an adviser meeting? Before or after starting work? When you ended your claim for benefit?*
 - *Did it play any part in encouraging them to go out to work?*
 - *What difference did getting it make to your household income?*
 - *What was the extra money used for?*
 - *How long did they receive/have they been receiving the credit for?*
- Are they still getting it?*
- If not, why not? How did you manage financially after it stopped?*
- *Did you have to pay any of the credit back because of an over-payment?*

If no, they've not heard of it, ask the following questions

- *What do you think about such a credit?*
 - *Does it make you think more positively about the possibility of working?*
 - *If not, why not?*
 - *Would getting it make any difference to whether or not you went out to work?*
- If yes, how? What would you use it for?*
- If not, why not?*
- *Is £40 (Dudley & Sandwell)/£60(London) enough?*
 - *Did you know that your partner might be eligible to receive In Work Credit instead of you?*
 - *Would getting this amount make any difference to whether or not you or your partner went out to work?*

- *If not, why not?*
 - *Would it make any difference if both you and your partner each got a £40/£60 weekly bonus for a year?*
95. Has an adviser ever done a 'better off calculation' to see how much better off you would be in work?
*If yes, how much better off would you be? What did you feel about this? Was it sufficient?
Did he/she include In Work Credit in the calculation? (differentiate this from WTC)
Did he/she include your partner in the calculation?
If no, would you find this helpful?*
96. Have you ever received any leaflets or booklets about the help available to parents who are moving into work or thinking about work? (Marketing)
*If yes, where did you get the leaflet/information from?
What sort of information was included? Check whether New Deal Plus and related policies included in the information. Do you have a copy to hand? Could we have a look?
How useful did you find the information?*
97. Do you feel you have had sufficient information and advice about the support and financial help available to help parents into work?
*If yes, what do you think about the help available?
If no, would you like to have more information and advice?*
98. Are there any gaps in the help on offer, or any problems that you are aware of?
99. Do you have any suggestions for other types of help or how support for parents through the Jobcentre could be improved?
100. Do you have any questions or anything you would like to add that we've not mentioned so far?
101. We would like to contact you in about six months time to do a follow up interview, would this be OK?
102. Do you think you will be working/in a job in six months time? What about your partner?

Thank you very much for your time. Your contribution is much appreciated.

Ensure you give respondent their cash gift.

Text or phone your fieldwork buddy to let them know your interview is finished and you have safely left the house.

Evaluation of ND+fLP extension and related policies to couple parents

ND+fLP Pilot Manager Topic Guide London

Interview code

Does your fieldwork buddy know who you are interviewing and where?

Have you called Jo/the office today to tell them about any changes to your schedule?

Name of interviewee _____

Designation/job title of interviewee _____

Type of interview _____

Venue of interview (if face-to-face) _____

Date of interview _____

Name of researcher _____

Start time: _____ Finish time _____

Length of interview _____

Explain research objectives and scope of research:

The research objective is to examine the implementation of ND+ related policies and gain a sense of customer engagement and take-up with each element.

The specific scope and focus of the research in this area is (in bold):

- (ND+fLP pilot and Childcare Assist launched in April 2005).
- (Introduction of IWC at £40 to lone parents in April 2004 pilot (IWC Phase 1)).
- Introduction of IWC at £40 to couple parents in April 2005.
- Increase in IWC from £40 to £60 in July 2007 for lone and couple parents.
- Extension of ND+fLP, IWEDF & IWAS to couple parents across the district and to lone parents in North East London in April 2008.
- Introduction of up-front childcare costs pilot to NDLP participants in April 2008.

Secure permission for recording and use of quotes

Emphasise confidentiality and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis

Job and areas of responsibility

1. Can you tell me your job title and talk me through:
 - the length of time you have been in your current job
 - your main areas of responsibility

- other responsibilities beyond New Deal Plus
- your role specifically in relation to the measures we are evaluating i.e.
 - introduction of IWC at £40 to couple parents in April 2005
 - the increase in IWC to lone and couple parents to £60 in July 2007
 - the extension of ND+, IWEDF & IWAS to (lone and) couple parents in London in April 2008
 - the introduction of up-front childcare costs pilot to NDLP participants in April 2008

ND+, IWC, IWEDF & IWAS to couple parents

Design of the ND+ pilot extension

2. Can you tell me what your understanding is of the New Deal Plus extension and related support policies for parents (specifically as it applies to couple parents)? How would you describe it? Prompt for:
 - pre-employment support
 - post employment support
 - operational support

(Prompt also for different elements, i.e. *Discovery Events, More Voluntary Contact, access to Flexible Provision for training procurement, Childcare Subsidy, Childcare Assist, In Work Credit, In Work Emergency Discretion Fund, In Work Advisory Support, plus operational support – enhanced training, extra DASOs, Additional CPM*)
3. How does the extension differ from the original ND+fLP pilot? What has changed? Is the same team in place?
4. To what extent and in what capacity are partner/stakeholder organisations or external contractors involved in the pilot extension?
 - Children’s Centres?
 - Local authorities?
 - Training providers contracted through flexible provision?
 - Pathways and New Deal providers?
 - Discovery Event providers?
5. Are there any linkages between the extension and complementary policies, pilots or programmes?
 - London parent offer?
 - enhanced services for parents in Children’s Centres?
 - London childcare affordability pilots?
 - child poverty pilots?
6. To which Jobcentre Plus customers is New Deal Plus being extended? Which customers are eligible for the various measures?
 - partners of JSA claimants?
 - partners of IB/IA/ESA claimants?

- mainstream (JSA) claimants?
 - IB/IS/ESA claimants?
 - lone parents (in North East London)?
7. Which measures are (main claimant) parents in receipt of JSA eligible for?
- are they eligible for IWC?
8. How is progress/success being monitored and measured? How are ND+ and related policies take-up and outcomes being recorded? Do you have any targets associated with ND+, IWC, IWEDF or IWAS? Do you have access to management information and statistics?
9. Where did your understanding of the extension come from? Was any specific guidance issued for how the pilot should be implemented or who should be involved? How useful was this?

Implementation and delivery

10. Can you tell me how the ND+ pilot extension is being implemented across this district?
- how is it being implemented in North London?
 - how is it being implemented in North East London?
 - what are the key differences?
 - what links are there with the new ‘family’ or ‘parent’ teams?
11. Where have you focused your efforts, and why?
12. Which staff have specific responsibility for implementing the extension of ND+ and related support policies for parents (IWC , IWEDF, IWAS, Childcare Subsidy and Childcare Assist) to couple parents? What are their roles?
- New Deal Plus pilot manager?
 - Childcare Partnership Managers?
 - Assistant Childcare Partnership Managers?
13. How are the different measures being delivered and are there any issues? If I go through each measure, could you give me an indication (based on general knowledge, staff feed-back or MI) of any issues you or your staff are aware of:
- *Discovery Events*
 - *More Voluntary Contact*
 - *Access to Flexible Provision for training procurement* – has any new training been procured? Are there any issues?
 - Childcare Assist
 - Childcare Subsidy
 - In Work Credit
 - In Work Emergency Discretion Fund
 - In Work Advisory Support
 - Any other related measures?

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14. How have the operational support measures made available to implement the pilot extension been used? How useful and effective was this support? Was this additional resource adequate? Are there any issues? Specifically prompt for:
 - enhanced training for advisers
 - additional administrative support
 - Assistant Childcare Partnership Manager
 - marketing budget
15. How has the marketing budget been used?
 - have old materials (e.g. the 'chocolate box' leaflet) been amended or have new marketing products been designed/ordered? If so, can we see some examples?
 - If not, why not?
16. Have there been any issues around the procurement of marketing materials? Has it been easy or difficult?
17. What is the management structure for the New Deal Plus pilot?
 - How does your job fit into the divisional management structure?
 - Are (adviser) staff managed centrally throughout the district or locally by an adviser services manager or Jobcentre manager? Are there any issues arising from this?
 - Are Diary Administrative Support Officers managed locally or centrally? Are there any issues arising from this?
18. Which Jobcentre Plus staff are involved in the wider delivery of ND+ and related support policies for couple parents (IWC, IWEDF, IWAS, Childcare Subsidy and Childcare Assist)? What are their roles?
 - Adviser Service Managers (which ones)
 - Jobcentre managers
 - NDLP and NDP advisers
 - CETL team (customer engagement team leader)
 - DASOs
 - mainstream JSA and New Deal advisers
 - fortnightly signing teams
 - IBPAs
 - IWC managers
 - IWC officers
 - Benefit centre staff
 - administrative staff (which?)
 - others?
19. Is there a separate IWC team?
 - If so, what is their role and how is the team managed?
 - If not, does this create an additional administrative burden for advisers?

20. Are staffing structures impacting on/or affecting the delivery of ND+ and IWC in any way? Are they a help or a hindrance to the delivery of ND+ and IWC to couple parents?
21. Are staff involved both in the implementation and wider delivery of the various measures able to operate effectively? Do they have the right skills and capacity? Has any specific training or guidance been delivered to staff? Which staff have been included? What did the training and guidance consist of?
22. What are the main administrative functions associated with delivering ND+, IWC, IWEDF, IWAS, Childcare Subsidy and Childcare Assist. How are these being carried out? Are there any issues or difficulties?
 - Is the identification of main claimant parents an issue?
 - Any issues around Child Details marker (formerly CBW)?
 - Arranging Childcare Assist?
 - Arranging Childcare Subsidy payments?
 - IWC & IWEDF administration?
 - Customer eligibility?
23. Are any other new policies, pilots or initiatives affecting the implementation or delivery of ND+ or IWC to couples in any way?
 - lone parent obligations
 - new services for lone parents
 - ESA
 - national roll out of IWC, IWEDF, IWAS for lone parents
24. Has the economic downturn affected the capacity of staff to deliver ND+, IWC and related measures in any way?

Marketing and awareness raising among customers

25. How do couple parents who may be eligible for ND+ and related support policies for parents (IWC, IWEDF, IWAS, Childcare Subsidy and Childcare Assist) get to hear about these measures?
 - main claimants
 - dependent partners
 - (lone parents)
26. How are main claimants who are parents being identified?
27. To what extent are parents being informed and approached as individuals (i.e. dependent partners and benefits claimants) or as couples?
28. What efforts are being made to reach and engage parents outside of Jobcentre Plus/in community settings?
29. At which type of meeting or meetings and at what stage in the back to work journey are dependent partners being informed about ND+ and related policies?
 - Is ND+ being linked with 6 monthly WFIs for partners in any way?
 - What are the linkages between ND+ and New Deal for Partners (NDP)?
 - how does ND+ for couples map onto/relate to New Deal for Partners?

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30. At which type of meeting or meetings and at what stage in the back to work journey are main claimants being informed about ND+ and IWC?
31. How are ND+ and related support policies (IWC, IWEDF, IWAS Childcare Subsidy and Childcare Assist) being sold and communicated to couple parents?
32. Is ND+ and associated measures part of the standard offer to all parents?
33. Are the different elements (including IWC) being packaged together or separately?
34. What marketing methods and materials are being used? Are they the same for the different customer groups? Can we see some examples?
35. Does the marketing and communication strategy extend to partner/stakeholder organisations? If so, how well is this working?
 - have there been any referrals from outside Jobcentre Plus?

Staff responses and working practices

36. Has the extension of ND+, IWC, IWEDF and IWAS to couple parents affected the working practices or workloads of advisers and other staff?
37. Have adviser meetings with partners or main claimants been adapted or changed in any way as a result of the extension?
38. Are joint meetings being promoted or encouraged in any way?
39. How are different staff responding to the extension of ND+? Have they raised any particular issues or concerns about the extension of ND+ and IWC to couple parents?
 - NDLP & NDP advisers
 - mainstream JSA and New Deal advisers
 - fortnightly signing teams etc.

Take up and effectiveness to date

40. How are things going generally with the extension of ND+ and IWC to couple parents? What would you say are the key issues?
41. What impact has the roll out to parents across the whole of your district had?
 - what impact has it had in North London?
 - what impact has it had in North East London?
42. If I go through each of the measures separately, can you tell me how (the different types of) couple parents are reacting/responding, what the level of take-up is and if there are any issues?
 - *Discovery Events*
 - *More Voluntary Contact*
 - *Access to Flexible Provision for training procurement*
 - *Childcare Assist*
 - *Childcare Subsidy*
 - *In Work Credit*

- *In Work Emergency Discretion Fund*
- *In Work Advisory Support*

43. Which elements seem to be working best and why?
44. Which elements are working less well and why?
45. How are the different customer groups reacting and responding to the different measures?
 - main claimants?
 - dependent partners?
46. How do the responses and take up rates of couple parents (dependent partner parents and main claimant parents) compare with lone parents?
47. How do take up rates compare between North London and North East London?
48. Are customer responses and take up what you expected? If not, how do you account for this difference?
49. To what extent and in what ways are the issues and constraints couple parents face in going back to work similar to or different from those of lone parents?
50. Are there any differences in awareness or take-up by different client groups, particularly among the Black and Minority Ethnic population? If so, what accounts for these differences?
51. Has the increase in IWC from £40 to £60 in July 2007 made a difference to the take-up of IWC or parent employment outcomes?
 - is £60 sufficient incentive to persuade parents to enter and remain in work?
 - are there differences in the take-up of IWC between lone parents and couple parents (dependent partner parents and main claimant parents)? If so, why?
 - are there any differences in IWC take-up between parents from different ethnic groups? If so, why?
 - what proportion of customers remain on IWC for 52 weeks? Are there any differences between lone parents and couple parents?
52. What are the key factors affecting take up of the different measures (by the different customer groups)?
 - internal/operational factors?
 - attitudes to childcare?
 - attitudes to work?
 - ethnicity?
 - cultural factors?
 - 'London' specific factors (availability of suitable jobs, concentration of BME parents? affordability of transport, childcare etc.)
53. To what extent are customer volumes and eligibility affecting take up of the various measures?
 - low numbers of JSA couples?
 - IWC eligibility among JSA claimants/partners?

54. Are any other new policies, pilots or initiatives impacting on the delivery or success of ND+ or IWC in any way?
 - lone parent obligations
 - new services for lone parents
 - ESA
55. Has the economic downturn impacted on take-up of any of the measures?
56. To what extent are the new measures fulfilling their aim of helping couple parents to;
 - a) be caseloaded onto New Deal programmes (e.g. NDP, mainstream New Deals)
 - b) enter and sustain work?
57. Overall, what is your view of the ND+ 'offer'/package of measures (including IWC, IWEDF, IWAS, Childcare Subsidy and Childcare Assist) and its appropriateness to the needs of different parents? To what extent is ND+ succeeding in its aim of making support measures better attuned to the needs of all parents?
58. Are there any particular types of parents or particular barriers/constraints which the new measures seem unable to address? Are there any gaps?
59. What more could be done to improve employment rates among London based parents?

Up-front Childcare Costs Pilot

60. Is the need to pay for up-front childcare costs a major barrier to lone parents entering or returning to work?
61. How has the UFCC pilot been designed in this area and how is it being implemented?
 - is it being treated as part of the lone parent offer, new services for lone parents or as a separate pilot?
62. Are there any links with other London childcare related initiatives?
63. Which staff are responsible for implementing the UFCC pilot?
64. How is the pilot being managed and overseen?
65. How is progress/success being monitored and measured? Do you have any targets associated with UFCC? How is UFCC take-up and outcomes being recorded? Do you have access to MI and statistics?
66. What are the main administrative functions associated with UFCC and how are these being carried out? Are there any issues or difficulties?
67. Are there any issues around contact with childcare providers or deposit retrieval?
68. How are advisers being made aware and up-skilled in relation to UFCC?
69. How do lone parents who may be eligible for UFCC get to hear about it? How proactively is it being promoted?
70. How is UFCC being packaged and sold to lone parents?
 - an addition to the standard lone parent offer?
 - packaged with Childcare Assist and Childcare Subsidy?

- packaged alongside other childcare related forms of help?
 - Have any specific marketing materials been developed for UFCC, or is information included in other materials? Any examples?
71. How proactively is UFCC being marketed and communicated to lone parents?
 - at which type of meeting or meetings and at what stage in the back to work journey are lone parents being informed about UFCC?
 - would only lone parents participating in NDLP be told about it, or would it be promoted among all lone parents who might potentially benefit?
 72. How well is the pilot operating?
 73. Are any other policies, pilots or initiatives impacting on the operation or success of the UFCC pilot?
 74. Have advisers raised any concerns or issues to date about UFCC?
 75. Are there any issues around eligibility? Are lone parents being caseloaded for NDLP so that they can access UFCC?
 76. How do parents not eligible for UFCC pay for childcare? Are any other sources of funding available to help mitigate the high cost of childcare in London? To what extent would advisers raise awareness of these among their lone parent customers?
 77. How are lone parents responding to the offer of UFCC? What is the level of take up? Are there any differences in awareness or take-up by lone parents from Black and Minority Ethnic groups? What sort of factors seem to be affecting levels of take-up?
 78. Has the introduction of UFCC increased the use of formal childcare amongst NDLP participants?
 79. Are take up rates what was expected? If not, why not?
 80. To what extent is the UFCC pilot helping to change attitudes to work or childcare among lone parents who are more resistant to the idea of using formal childcare?
 81. Summing up, how are things going generally with the UFCC pilot? What would you say are the key issues? What could be done to improve the take up of UFCC?
 82. Finally, are there any other issues about the parent policies and measures discussed that you would like to raise?

Thank you very much for your time. I know you are all very busy people. Your contribution is much appreciated.

Mention the observations, timetable for completion of Wave 1 and report publication and the proposals for Wave 2 follow up telephone interviews.

Prior to publication, DWP will feedback findings to pilot managers for both waves of research.

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The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) introduced and extended a range of policy measures targeted at lone and couple parents under the banner of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (NDfLP), including In Work Credit (IWC). This was in response to the Harker review conducted for the Department in 2006 and aimed to increase parental employment as well as reduce child poverty.

The aim of the evaluation overall was to explore whether the measures offered an adequate package of support to parents and if the measures, either collectively or individually, encouraged them to enter and sustain work.

This report covers the first phase of the two-part qualitative evaluation, including early implementation, delivery and operational issues, together with awareness and use of NDfLP and IWC by Jobcentre Plus staff and couple parents, including 'main claimant' parents and 'partner' parents.

Fieldwork involved case studies in two pilot areas, one in London and one outside of London, approximately one year after the last of the measures was introduced. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 61 couple parents, of whom 31 were main claimant parents and 30 partner parents. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were also carried out with Jobcentre Plus staff involved in the pilot and wider delivery of the measures. In addition, three focus group discussions were held with advisory staff, including Lone Parent Advisers and mainstream advisers.

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