

**Department for Work and Pensions**

**Research Report No 408**

# **New Deal for Lone Parents: Non-participation qualitative research**

**Richard Brown and Lucy Joyce**

A report of research carried out by BMRB Social Research Limited on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

**Corporate Document Services**

© Crown Copyright 2007. Published for the Department for Work and Pensions under licence from the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office by Corporate Document Services, Leeds.

Application for reproduction should be made in writing to The Copyright Unit, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ.

First Published 2007.

ISBN 978 1 84712 148 6

Views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Department for Work and Pensions or any other Government Department.

Printed by Corporate Document Services.

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	v
Abbreviations and acronyms .....	vii
Summary .....	1
1 Introduction .....	5
1.1 Previous research findings .....	6
1.2 Research objectives .....	7
1.3 Research design and conduct .....	8
1.4 Conduct of the research .....	8
2 Background to lone parent respondents .....	11
2.1 Current activities and circumstances .....	11
2.1.1 <i>Health</i> .....	12
2.2 Education and employment histories .....	12
2.3 Future goals and aspirations .....	13
2.3.1 <i>Work-based goals</i> .....	14
2.3.2 <i>Personal non-work-based goals</i> .....	15
3 Introducing New Deal for Lone Parents .....	17
3.1 Notification of Work Focused Interviews .....	18
3.2 Activities undertaken as part of the Work Focused Interview .....	19
3.2.1 <i>Provision of support, advice and information</i> .....	20
3.2.2 <i>Undertaking tasks or services</i> .....	21
3.3 Advisers' approach to the Work Focused Interview .....	23
3.4 Invitation to participate in New Deal for Lone Parents .....	24
3.4.1 <i>Awareness and knowledge of NDLP</i> .....	25

4	Reasons for non-participation in New Deal for Lone Parents .....	27
4.1	Overarching issues .....	28
4.2	Key reasons for non-participation .....	29
4.2.1	<i>Awareness of NDLP</i> .....	30
4.2.2	<i>Attitudes to parenthood</i> .....	30
4.2.3	<i>Attitudes to childcare</i> .....	31
4.2.4	<i>Benefits and employment culture</i> .....	32
4.2.5	<i>Financial concerns</i> .....	33
4.2.6	<i>Personal circumstances</i> .....	34
4.2.7	<i>Practical issues</i> .....	35
4.2.8	<i>NDLP content</i> .....	36
4.3	Implications for New Deal for Lone Parents .....	36
4.4	Views on the principle of New Deal for Lone Parents .....	37
5	Conclusions .....	41
5.1	Key reasons for non-participation .....	41
5.2	Communicating and recording New Deal for Lone Parents .....	42
5.3	Understanding the previous quantitative survey findings .....	43
5.4	Implications for New Deal for Lone Parents .....	44
5.5	Respondents' suggestions for change .....	44
Appendix A	Research design and conduct .....	47
Appendix B	Topic guide: Advisers .....	51
Appendix C	Topic guide: Lone parents .....	59
Appendix D	Vignettes and good news stories .....	67
Appendix E	Qualitative analysis .....	71
Appendix F	Work Focused Interview policy information .....	73

## List of tables

Table A.1	Lone parent sample .....	49
Table A.2	Initial adviser focus group sample .....	49
Table A.3	Reconvened adviser focus group sample .....	50

## List of figures

Figure 4.1	Distance from the labour market .....	36
------------	---------------------------------------	----

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the research team at the Department for Work and Pensions for their help and support with this project, in particular Alasdair Yeo, Ellenor Brooks and Jenny Crook.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all the individuals who participated in the research for the time they gave and for sharing their experiences.

Furthermore, we would also like to acknowledge and thank the BMRB field management team and the network of recruiters who worked on this study, for their hard work and effort throughout.

Finally our thanks go to the research team: Alex Brunel, Jane Durham, Ruth Rajkumar, Andrew Thomas and Matthew Williams.



# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>ADF</b>	Adviser Discretionary Fund
<b>BA</b>	Benefits Agency
<b>CTB</b>	Council Tax Benefit
<b>ES</b>	Employment Service
<b>HB</b>	Housing Benefit
<b>IS</b>	Income Support
<b>JSA</b>	Jobseeker's Allowance
<b>LA</b>	Local authority
<b>LMS</b>	Labour Market System
<b>ND</b>	New Deal
<b>NDLP</b>	New Deal for Lone Parents
<b>QWFI</b>	Quarterly Work Focused Interview
<b>WFI</b>	Work Focused Interview





# Summary

New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is one part of the Government's 'Welfare to Work' agenda first introduced in July 1997. NDLP is designed to assist lone parents who want to enter or re-enter the labour market in a way that suits their circumstances and is based on the premise that each lone parent needs individualised help and advice to meet their needs. Participation is voluntary and it aims to encourage lone parents to increase their living standards by moving into or increasing paid work.

The main gateway to NDLP is via compulsory Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) and review meetings, undertaken by the specialist lone parent advisers (LP advisers). WFIs are intended to increase participation in NDLP by making lone parents aware of the help and support available to them at the beginning of their Income Support (IS) claim. Despite interventions there remains a core of lone parents who choose not to participate in NDLP and previous survey findings<sup>1</sup> indicate that nearly two-thirds of eligible lone parents are unable to provide specific reasons for this.

In order to gain a more detailed understanding of the reasons for non-participation in the NDLP programme, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned **BMRB Social Research** to undertake a qualitative research study. Specifically, the research aimed to explore awareness and knowledge of the NDLP programme; experience and views of the introduction of NDLP via the WFI; reactions to the programme; and the decision making processes involved in non-participation.

The research took place between March and October 2006 and comprised four stages: an initial adviser stage, an observation stage, a study of lone parent customers and reconvened groups with advisers.

---

<sup>1</sup> 'NDLP Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey', by Lessof, C. et al (2003): reference WAE147.

## Key findings

Non-participation in NDLP was identified as occurring for a number of reasons. These reasons were interlinked and reciprocally impacted on one another. The key reasons included:

- **Attitudes towards parenthood** – caring for their child(ren) was of paramount importance to participants and was often viewed as a full-time job which took priority over all other factors.
- **Views regarding childcare** – concerns primarily related to the idea of having a ‘stranger’ look after their child(ren). Practical issues, such as, the cost and standard of the facilities were also mentioned.
- **Personal circumstances** – a range of personal issues were highlighted as reasons for non-participation, including ill-health; unstable family circumstances as a result of divorce or moving house; low levels of confidence and job-readiness; and as a result of being engaged in other activities, such as education or training.
- **Financial concerns** – concerns related to the transition from benefits to work and the potential this had to destabilise or unsettle the family.
- **Lack of awareness and knowledge of the NDLP programme** – this was linked to the absence of an explicit invitation to participate in NDLP, but also to a wider low profile of the programme.
- **Cultural factors** – LP advisers were keen to stress the impact of cultural factors on lone parents’ decision making, particularly the impact of a culture of ‘living on benefits’.
- **Practical issues** – issues such as childcare and transport were also noted.

The content of NDLP did not tend to be spontaneously mentioned as a reason for deciding not to engage with the programme. Where the content was discussed, it was generally seen as being rather irrelevant, as more salient reasons and considerations tended to overshadow the decision.

## Introducing NDLP

As WFIs are the main vehicle through which the NDLP programme is introduced to lone parents, experiences and views of these were explored in order to gain an understanding of adviser methods for promoting and introducing NDLP to lone parents.

Importantly, advisers suggested they did not tend to explicitly invite lone parents to participate in the NDLP programme during the WFI and certainly lone parents did not tend to recall being asked to participate by advisers. Although aspects of the NDLP programme were mentioned by advisers, such as the In Work Calculation or training, NDLP was not usually being marketed to customers as a unified package.

The decision not to invite lone parents to engage in the NDLP programme was usually made consciously by advisers during the WFI as a result of:

- the perceived intangible nature of the programme, which it was felt would confuse and discourage lone parents from engaging with the WFI or any of the discrete elements of NDLP;
- the image of New Deal *per se*, particularly the link between NDLP and other mandatory New Deal programmes which was seen as off-putting; and
- the perceived inappropriateness of the programme to meet the specific needs of customers.

The awareness and knowledge exhibited by lone parent customers regarding NDLP was limited and even in cases where they were aware of the name, they were usually unable to recall any specific aspects of the programme. It is reasonable to assume that this low level of awareness and understanding is, in part, linked to the absence of an explicit invitation to participate by advisers. However, it also suggests that the programme suffers from a more general low profile.

When findings relating to the lone parents' awareness and knowledge were explored with advisers, they overwhelmingly agreed and suggested they would not expect lone parent customers to be familiar with the programme, primarily as they tended not to raise the issue, but also as a result of a general lack of marketing around the programme. Indeed, advisers suggested that even they failed to have a complete understanding of NDLP.

### **Reasons for non-participation**

As lone parents tended not to have received an explicit invitation to participate in NDLP by advisers, they had not usually engaged in an active decision making process regarding participation at the time of the WFI, rather, reasons tended to be based on an immediate consideration of their views at the time of the interview. Furthermore, when lone parents were asked to consider reasons for non-participation, they often found it difficult to consider these in isolation from their views about employment despite being encouraged to do so and in this sense, views of employment and NDLP were linked.

Importantly, advisers' definitions of what constitutes being on NDLP varied and this certainly resulted in the existence of a 'grey area' regarding the definition of participation in NDLP. This 'grey area' not only related to perceptions regarding what constitutes being on NDLP, but is also linked to the process of recording participation on the system, with advisers adopting inconsistent approaches to recording this information and setting the Labour Market System (LMS) marker.

A wide range of reasons for non-participation in NDLP were highlighted by lone parents and these included: a lack of awareness of NDLP; attitudes towards parenthood; views regarding childcare; cultural factors; financial concerns; personal circumstances; practical issues, such as transport; and the content of NDLP. It was usual for lone parents to offer multiple explanations for their decision not to participate and although certain reasons were more salient than others, reasons tended to overlap and work to reciprocally impact on one another. Importantly, the views of advisers and lone parents regarding non-participation tended to align.

It is clear that decisions concerning non-participation in NDLP were the result of multiple, overlapping factors. However, certain reasons given were clearly more fixed and insurmountable than others. For example, attitude towards parenthood, particularly the desire to stay at home and look after their child(ren), and the personal circumstances of respondents, such as an unstable family life, were often described as being non-negotiable. In contrast, lone parents tended to be more open to the programme when reasons given related to practical issues, such as transport; concerns about finances; or a lack of qualifications and skills for example.

Views regarding the relevance of NDLP also tended to be linked to customers' job-readiness, with those customers at either end of the spectrum of job-readiness being more resistant to engaging in the programme, either because they perceived themselves as being removed from the labour market, or as they felt sufficiently close not to require assistance from Jobcentre Plus.

These findings have implications for NDLP and raise questions regarding a number of issues, including:

- how the programme is marketed, for example, whether marketing should be increased to raise awareness and knowledge of the programme;
- how the programme is packaged, whether it should be unified and packaged or deconstructed, where specific elements can be used flexibly outside the banner of New Deal; and
- who to target. Should NDLP target the full spectrum of lone parents, or simply focus on those who have the desire to return to work in order to maximise resources?

Advisers and lone parent respondents made a number of suggestions for improving NDLP and encouraging participation in the programme. These suggestions tended to relate to either the level of information provided regarding NDLP; the content and approach of the WFI or the NDLP programme; or to wider policy issues, such as offering family-friendly employment terms.

# 1 Introduction

New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is one part of the Government's 'Welfare to Work' agenda first introduced in July 1997 and is part of wider Government interest in active labour market policies. It is one aspect of the Government's commitment to promoting work amongst groups perceived as being disadvantaged in the labour market.

NDLP is specifically designed to assist lone parents who want to enter or re-enter the labour market in a way that suits their circumstances. It is based on the premise that each lone parent needs individualised help and advice to meet their needs. Participation is voluntary and it aims to encourage lone parents to increase their living standards by moving into or increasing paid work.

NDLP was implemented in three phases:

- **Phase 1:** July 1997 to October 1998 – Prototype areas were launched in eight separate locations throughout the country, four of which were operated by the Employment Service (ES) and four by the Benefits Agency (BA).
- **Phase 2:** April 1998 to October 1998 – National rollout of the programme commenced with all lone parents making new or repeat claims for IS (whose youngest child was aged over five years and three months), being invited to participate in NDLP. Lone parents with children under the age of five years and three months did not receive an invitation letter but were able to participate.
- **Phase 3:** October 1998 onwards – The full national rollout of NDLP was delivered by the ES with the support of the BA. Invitation letters were sent to all lone parents whose youngest child was aged over five years and three months who had made a claim for IS prior to April 1998, as well as those making new IS claims.

The main gateway to NDLP is via compulsory Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) and review meetings, undertaken by the specialist lone parent advisers (LP advisers). WFIs are intended to increase participation in NDLP by making lone parents aware of the help and support available to them at the beginning of their IS claim. They were introduced in October 2000 for lone parents making new or repeat claims in three pathfinder areas, and were then introduced nationally in April 2001 (see Appendix F).

NDLP is delivered by specialist LP advisers, who undertake a range of activities and services, including:

- consideration of an individual's current circumstances in order that the lone parent moves toward employment they can enjoy;
- discussion of employment goals and aspirations;
- financial calculations, exploring how much better off they could be in a job;
- developing an action plan, to help them move towards employment;
- assistance undertaking job search activities;
- assistance exploring training opportunities;
- support identifying local registered childcare;
- help with expenses that may occur during job search;
- the provision of advice and information regarding benefit entitlement; and
- on-going support after securing employment.

## 1.1 Previous research findings

Despite interventions there remains a core of lone parents who choose not to participate in NDLP, with figures suggesting that only 17.46 per cent of eligible lone parents are currently taking part in the programme. Survey findings<sup>2</sup> indicate that there are a number of factors that can differentiate between participation and non-participation in NDLP and typically, participation in NDLP is associated with:

- a short claim history;
- having worked in the past six months;
- a 'better off in work' attitude;
- having qualifications;
- willing to accept jobs paying the minimum wage;

---

<sup>2</sup> *'NDLP Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey'*, by Lessof, C. et al (2003): reference WAE147.

- younger, particularly under 25;
- having smaller families (typically one child);
- absence of sickness/health problems;
- likely to be living in council/housing association property;
- having the use of a telephone; and
- having a full driving licence.

The survey also suggested that when asked to provide specific reasons regarding why they had not participated in the NDLP programme, nearly two-thirds of eligible lone parents were unable to do so. Of those who gave a reason, childcare was the most common reason given. Although many of the differentiating factors highlighted in the survey were statistically significant, they were nevertheless quite small differences. There is, therefore, a pool of non-participants who have similar characteristics to NDLP participants but who do not appear to have a clear reason for their non-participation.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned **BMRB Social Research** to undertake qualitative research to explore the reasons for non-participation in the NDLP programme, in order to gain a more detailed understanding of non-participation.

The report is divided into five chapters: **this chapter** provides background to the research and briefly outlines the design and methodological approaches adopted (see Appendix A for the full research design). **Chapter 2** considers the background to the respondents, focusing on education and employment histories, as well as future goals and aspirations. The introduction of NDLP is the subject of **Chapter 3**, and this looks at notification and content of the WFI, as well as awareness and knowledge of NDLP. **Chapter 4** considers the reasons given for non-participation, and views on the principle of the programme; and finally, **Chapter 5** outlines the main conclusions and makes recommendations for change as suggested by respondents.

## 1.2 Research objectives

**Overall, this research aimed to explore key reasons for non-participation in the NDLP programme.** More specifically, it considered:

- awareness and knowledge of the NDLP programme;
- experiences, attitudes and views of the WFI, particularly focusing on the introduction of NDLP via the WFI and how this impacts on participation;
- reactions of lone parents to the NDLP programme and key reasons given for non-participation;

- the decision making process regarding take up of NDLP;
- the salience of reasons for non-participation;
- views on the principle of NDLP; and
- recommendations for how the programme or its delivery could be improved.

### 1.3 Research design and conduct

The research was undertaken in four Jobcentre Plus districts and comprised four main stages: an initial adviser stage, an observation stage, a study of lone parents and reconvened groups with advisers:

- **Initial adviser stage** – Fieldwork was carried out in April 2006 and comprised five focus groups with LP advisers.
- **Observation stage** – Researchers undertook observations of five WFIs in each area (20 observations). Following this, lone parent customers were invited to engage in a short interview to explore their understanding and views on the WFI and advisers were also interviewed and their views discussed.
- **Lone parent stage** – A total of 80 face-to-face depth interviews were carried out with lone parents, with 20 conducted in each area. In addition to area, quotas were also set for a range of variables, including: age; gender; age of youngest child; length of claim; qualifications; and family size.
- **Adviser reconvened stage** – Following completion of stage three, focus groups with advisers were re-convened. This stage aimed to feedback key findings from previous stages, in order to gather advisers' reactions to these, but also to gain a greater understanding of the possible reasons underpinning the findings. In total four re-convened groups were carried out, one in each area.

### 1.4 Conduct of the research

Respondents were purposively selected by BMRB's in-house team of specialist field recruiters, using the sample criteria agreed with the DWP. Respondents were recruited from two samples provided by the DWP: a list of district Jobcentre Plus contacts; and an LMS (Labour Market System) database extract including contact details of lone parent customers who had attended a WFI within the four geographical areas selected for the research<sup>3</sup>.

All the depth interviews, group discussions and observations used non-directive interviewing techniques. Interviews for each stage were guided by a topic guide developed by BMRB, in close liaison with the DWP (see Appendices B and C).

---

<sup>3</sup> To protect participants' anonymity the research areas have been labelled A, B, C and D. More information regarding the research areas is included in Appendix A.



The verbatim transcripts produced were subject to a rigorous content analysis. The findings reported have been illustrated with the use of verbatim quotations and where necessary, the details of the contributors or their subjects have been moderately changed to protect anonymity.

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to report on the range of views, experiences and suggestions reported by advisers, customers and providers. The purposive nature of the sample design as well as the sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or suggestions.

A full discussion of the research methodology and analytical procedures, including a full sample profile, can be found in Appendix A.



## 2 Background to lone parent respondents

This chapter provides a background to the lone parent respondents who took part in this research study. It looks at current activity and circumstances; employment and education histories; and finally considers future work aspirations and goals. The information included is drawn from both the adviser and lone parent stages of the research:

- The type, length and nature of lone parents' claims varied across the sample.
- In addition to claiming benefit, certain participants were also engaged in additional activities, such as education and training.
- Health problems were noted within the lone parent sample, including both physical and emotional problems. Issues regarding the health of their child(ren) were also raised.
- Despite exceptions, participants tended to have low grade qualifications or lack qualifications altogether. Basic skills needs were also identified.
- Employment histories were often characterised by intermittent periods of work in low and minimum wage jobs and in some instances, there was no previous work history.
- Consideration of future goals and aspirations varied, with certain respondents having made plans for the future and others living more day-to-day. The nature of goals also varied and related to both work and personal circumstances, such as settling the family.

## 2.1 Current activities and circumstances

At the time of the research, lone parents were claiming a range of benefits including: IS, Incapacity Benefit (IB), Carers Allowance, Housing Benefit (HB), Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and Child Tax Credit. The length of time respondents had been claiming benefits as a lone parent varied, with claims ranging from between one to in excess of ten years. Claims were not always continuous and were in some instances interspersed with periods of not claiming, either as a result of finding work or due to a change in personal circumstances, such as marriage or living with a partner.

There were those who had begun claiming benefit following the birth of their child, while others had a history of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) prior to claiming as a lone parent. For example, one lone parent had worked in retail and as a cleaner, had been made redundant on both occasions and consequently received JSA before claiming IS as a lone parent.

In addition to claiming benefit, in some cases participants were engaged in additional activities such as, education and training at college or university and/or part-time work. Part-time work tended to be either voluntary – with a view to converting it into a permanent job, or was described as being 'low paid'. For instance, one lone parent from Area D was studying for an NVQ 2 in hairdressing while also doing voluntary work in a local salon, with a view to ending their claim once the qualification was obtained.

### 2.1.1 Health

Health problems were noted by participants in some instances and there were examples of both physical problems, such as arthritis, back conditions, visual impairment, coronary artery disease and diabetes; as well as mental health issues, such as depression.

In addition to their own health, the health of the lone parents' children was also a concern. In some instances, lone parents were caring for children with physical, behavioural and mental health issues, such as autism or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

## 2.2 Education and employment histories

The lone parents in this sample tended to have low grade qualifications<sup>4</sup> or lack qualifications altogether, having left school without sitting or passing formal examinations such as GCSEs. Reasons for this varied, although for a number of respondents this was said to be a direct result of becoming pregnant:

---

<sup>4</sup> This was based on respondents' own perception of the qualifications they had.

*'I left school when I was fifteen because I was pregnant with my first one. So, I left. So, I never got no qualifications.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)

Basic skills needs were also identified, including difficulties reading and writing; these issues were highlighted by both advisers and lone parents. For example, one lone parent explained how they are unable to help their children with homework as a result of their basic skills issues:

*'My daughter brings home her homework and after going to school, because I can't even read the homework and her spelling for a ten year old is ridiculous, I said you want me to test them and I can't even read them, so I've had to ask that my children have extra help in school because of my reading and writing.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area D)

More exceptionally lone parents had attained vocational/job specific qualifications, GCSEs, 'A' Levels and degrees, for instance, a degree in psychology from the Open University. Although qualifications were in some cases gained as part of compulsory education or directly following this, they had usually been obtained in later life, following a gap from compulsory education.

As with current employment, employment histories were often characterised by intermittent periods of work in low and minimum wage jobs. These ended for a range of reasons, including: pregnancy; being supported by a partner; or due to health issues. Lone parents' employment histories typically featured jobs such as: caring, cleaning, retail, sales, administration and carpentry or other building-related jobs:

*'I've had a lot of unemployment, because I've been bringing up the kids...so I never really worked.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area A)

Examples of lone parents with no work histories were also evident, particularly amongst younger respondents and those with more than two children.

## 2.3 Future goals and aspirations

As part of the research interview, respondents were asked to consider their future goals and aspirations. It was clear that previous consideration of these goals and aspirations varied across the sample and while immediate and long-term goals had been deliberated and decided on in some cases (particularly in the case of more job-ready customers); for others goals were often more short-term, vague or even non-existent, with respondents very much living on a day-to-day basis in some instances:

*'I just deal with the day as it comes.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area C)

Although they could be held in tandem, the future goals and aspirations highlighted could broadly be divided into two categories: those associated with work and those relating to the personal lives of lone parents. These are outlined below.

### 2.3.1 Work-based goals

Making the move towards employment either meant starting work for the first time or returning to work following a gap, with some lone parents planning to return to a previous employer.

For the most part, it tended to be lone parents with shorter claim histories; those holding qualifications; or those with previous work experience who had the firmest work-based future plans. In contrast, where respondents had been removed from the labour market for an extended period or had never worked, lacked qualifications or had basic skills needs, they tended to feel that they would need to engage in some form of training in order to secure employment. This was particularly the case where they wished to embark on a career, rather than to simply find a job. Employment goals mentioned included careers in: childcare, counselling, teaching, hairdressing, IT services and the military:

*'I think I would need to go to college and get something behind us, you know, I don't want to be just stuck in a cleaning job or behind a shop counter, you know. I would rather do something to help people. You know, maybe counselling or something like that.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)

Importantly, work-based aspirations generally focused on a point in the future where their child(ren) were deemed to be a suitable age. Views regarding the 'ideal' age varied across the sample and those mentioned included beginning nursery, infant and secondary school, through to finishing school aged 16 years:

*'I am adamant that I'm not working until these [children] are at school, but I will definitely find myself a job that fits in with school hours when they are at school.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area D)

In cases where either the parent or child(ren) suffered from ill-health, work-based goals tended to be less absolute and indeed for some, were identified as being a rather distant aspiration:

*'I was anticipating when I first left [work] that I would be back at work within a year. That went haywire and it was making me feel bad the fact that I wasn't so I've decided on another tactic which is right ignore that, I will get back to work I know that one day I know I will. It's just the journey to that point that's what I'm trying to work out.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area C)

Importantly, work-based aspirations were often linked to a general desire to stop claiming benefits. In addition to this, a number of other key reasons were noted, including:

- **improved financial situations.** Finding work was linked to improving their financial position, which lone parents often felt would enable them to more comfortably pay household bills and provide more for their child(ren), in a range of ways, such as food, clothes, treats and holidays. An increase in income was also identified as an essential part of obtaining a stable home environment:

*'I'd like to have enough, I don't want to be greedy, to have enough just to be comfortable. To pay my gas, electric, rent, council tax and to get the food for the kids, maybe a treat once a week for them. To go places and have enough to be comfortable and have enough to put a bit back and take them on holiday after saving up. Because my daughters nearly eleven and she's never been and she keeps asking "are we going on holiday"? Well, I cannot. I live off just over a hundred and odd pound a week so it is hard.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)

- **re-establishing identity.** For some, finding employment was linked to regaining a sense of identity aside from being a parent and it was suggested this could be achieved as a result of getting out of the house and mixing with other adults:

*'Well, in the last four years, I've never even socialised, I've never been out or, you know. I've really got myself into a rut.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B); and

- **setting a positive example.** A desire to find employment was for some driven by the value they placed on working and the need to act as a role model and pass this value onto their child(ren), in whom they wanted to instil the ethos of work. Furthermore, they also hoped their effort to work and provide a better life would be noted and appreciated by their child(ren).

### 2.3.2 Personal non-work-based goals

In addition to work related aims respondents also mentioned a number of goals associated with their personal lives. Those mentioned included: raising and caring for their child(ren); improving their personal health; and settling the family.

**Raising and caring for children** was of paramount importance to lone parents across the sample and caring for them was universally identified as a long-term personal goal. Caring for children was deemed to be of particular importance in cases where they were estranged from the other parent or identified as requiring more support, perhaps over the long term, for example where children experienced health or behavioural difficulties:

*'I used to be a painter and decorator. But I don't know. In a few years time I don't know [if I will be working]. [I want to] learn to live with my kids, be a better dad I suppose because at the end of the day their mum don't bother with them and so it's my job to try and build them a future.'*

(Lone parent, male, Area C)

**Ensuring the family was settled** was also noted as a personal future goal and this could either be short or long-term. Settling the family could relate to a number of issues, such as: being rehoused by the local authority in order to find a permanent home; or relocated to a different area, in some cases to distance themselves and their family from an ex-partner following an abusive relationship. One respondent described how they had previously been in an abusive relationship and were working to organise accommodation for their family:

*'I'm trying to get this place together somehow really, sort my children out ... basically, I mean I come from a bad relationship, I've wound up being a lone parent. It's really sorting things out ... it was quite a destructive effect it had on them, I mean my ex-partner, my ex-husband was hitting the children and that, could be quite destructive.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area D)

For some, settling the family also involved finding a new partner, who would help look after the children and provide additional financial and emotional support:

*'Ideally I'd like to be settled down with a new husband who's out working and supporting us, and off benefits, but whether that happens we'll wait and see.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area C)



## 3 Introducing New Deal for Lone Parents

This chapter considers the introduction of NDLP at the point of the WFI interview, from the perspective of lone parents and advisers. Findings from the observation stage of the research are also included. Specifically, this chapter considers the notification and content of the WFI, with a view to gaining an understanding of the invitation to participate in NDLP made by advisers during the interview. Lone parents' awareness and knowledge of the NDLP programme is also explored:

- Supporting the lone parent was identified as a key aspect of the adviser role and the issue of employment was usually discussed with a 'light touch', in the context of considering future possibilities.
- Advisers adopted a flexible and sensitive approach to the WFI and interviews were tailored according to perceptions of: job-readiness and interest in work, reaction to the WFI, and the age of their youngest child.
- Importantly, advisers did not tend to explicitly invite lone parents to participate in the NDLP programme during the WFI and certainly lone parents did not tend to recall being asked to participate by advisers.
- The decision not to invite lone parents to engage in NDLP was usually made consciously and three main reasons were given for this: the perceived intangible nature of the programme; the image of New Deal *per se*; and the inappropriateness of the programme given the needs of the customer.
- The awareness and knowledge exhibited by lone parent customers regarding NDLP was limited. Although potentially a result of the absence of an explicit invitation to participate, it also suggests a wider low profile of the programme.

WFIs are an important area of interest when considering reasons for non-participation, as they are intended to increase participation in NDLP by making lone parents aware of the help and support available to them as part of NDLP and also as they are the main vehicle through which the programme is introduced.

The WFIs were initially set up in October 2000 and were rolled out gradually for both new/repeat and stock claimants, depending on the age of the youngest child. Initially lone parents on IS were required to attend a yearly review meeting following the WFI. However, from April 2002 new and repeat claimants of IS are required to attend a review meeting after six months, again six months after that and annually thereafter. Stock claimants are required to attend a review meeting after 12 months of their initial meeting and annually thereafter.

From September 2004 until April 2007, lone parents on IS for more than 12 months, who lived within the Extended Schools Childcare Pilot areas and whose youngest child is aged 12 or over, have been required to attend Quarterly WFIs (QWFIs). Since October 2005, all stock customers whose youngest child is aged 14-15 years have been required to attend a QWFI (see Appendix F).

### 3.1 Notification of Work Focused Interviews

Prior to attending a WFI, lone parents tended to recall receiving a WFI invitation letter by post to notify and invite them to attend an interview with an LP adviser at a Jobcentre Plus office.

Although the invitation was met with mixed reactions overall, in the case of lone parents claiming for the first time, it was often described as 'unsettling'. This reaction was primarily said to be a result of the official and formal tone of the invitation, although, misunderstandings about the content also led to a false perception that they would be pressurised into work. For example, one lone parent respondent explained how, on receiving the letter, they felt concerned they would be expected to secure work, while also caring for two children:

*'I was wondering whether it [WFI] would be because I'd got to get a job, that's what I was worrying about, you know, "oh no, they're going to tell me I've got to get a job", and I was thinking I wouldn't be able to cope with the two little ones, and we'd just moved into our house. It was quite worrying when I got the letter.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area C)

This misunderstanding and anxiety was typically said to have been a consequence of the title of the interview: 'Work Focused Interview', as it was thought to suggest that finding work was the key purpose of the appointment. Advisers concurred with these views and suggested that the title had the effect of 'scaring' lone parents:

*'It scares them to death, the fact they're coming for a Work Focused Interview, immediately thinking they're going to be pushed [into work].'*

(LP adviser, female, Area A)

Concerns about the WFI tended to be less pronounced for new claimants where in addition to the invitation, they had also received additional information, such as an explanatory booklet (which in some cases was said to have accompanied the letter) or where family or peers had already attended a WFI. Initial fears also tended to be calmed in cases where the lone parent contacted the Jobcentre Plus office by telephone to discuss the purpose and process of the meeting with an adviser:

*'I had to ring up to ask what it [WFI] meant because I wasn't quite sure what it meant because they said it as if I knew what it was but I had only recently gone on to benefits and I have never claimed them before in my life...so, I think they must have just assumed I knew what it meant. So I rang up and they were very nice on the phone and described what it meant and when I re-read it I thought "well, of course it does".'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)

Similarly, customers who had experience of attending WFIs in the past usually felt confident about attending and did not express concerns about being 'forced' into employment. In these instances, lone parents saw the notification letter simply as a method of explaining the mandatory nature of the WFI and viewed the WFI as an opportunity to update the adviser on their personal circumstances; discuss employment options; and gain any appropriate help available. Indeed, those who considered themselves to be job-ready or eager to make the transition from benefits to work, were generally pleased to have received an appointment for a WFI, as they felt it encouraged them and reminded them to move forwards:

*'I do like the idea that they call you in because it gives you a bit of a push.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area C)

Moreover, the WFI was described as being cathartic for some, as a result of providing an opportunity to 'get out of the house' and talk with another adult who it was thought respected and understood the issues they were facing.

### 3.2 Activities undertaken as part of the Work Focused Interview

A wide range of activities were undertaken as part of the WFI, these were observed by researchers and highlighted by advisers and lone parents alike. The activities tended to relate either to the provision of support, advice and information regarding issues such as education or employment; or they related to the delivery of services and tasks, such as developing an Action Plan or undertaking an In Work Calculation.

Activities undertaken as part of the content of the WFI are outlined in the following sections.

### 3.2.1 Provision of support, advice and information

Supporting the lone parent was identified as a key aspect of the adviser role according to advisers, and this was usually said to involve listening and discussing problems and issues raised by the lone parent, such as health, relationships or those concerning children. Indeed, discussing these types of issues and attempting to find solutions was typically undertaken before any other tasks, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the lone parents' personal circumstances:

*'Before you can even mention work, quite often they've told you the ins and outs of their whole life, what problems and what they've come across and why they can't work.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area A)

The issue of employment was usually discussed with a 'light touch' and in the context of considering future possibilities and aspirations. Discussions focused on lone parents' employment histories, possible areas of interest, and potential future employment avenues. Lone parent intentions regarding employment were gauged based on this initial discussion and advisers used this, in addition to discussions regarding personal circumstances, to guide their approach.

Regardless of job-readiness, advisers suggested they were always very keen to stress the support and financial help available to lone parents should they choose to make the transition into work and indeed, lone parents also noted this. For example, one lone parent explained how they had received advice regarding the availability of tax credits:

*'She [LP adviser] did explain that you know, that they would be there when I was ready and I didn't have to you know, go back to work straight away, she wasn't sort of pressurising me at all. She was just genuinely really helpful and wanted to show me my options and what kind of help I could get and she kind of explained the tax credit system to me.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area A)

Moreover, WFIs were usually used to motivate lone parents into contemplating the possibility of employment by suggesting that work would broaden horizons, build confidence and benefit them financially.

Discussions regarding qualifications held by lone parents also took place as part of the WFI and advisers attempted to identify any training needs and match them with any relevant training opportunities open to lone parents:

*'I will talk to them about help through learning and college courses, education, whatever there is available.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area D)

However, appropriate training was often said to be unavailable as a result of local resource issues which were said to have negatively impacted on the training available. This was noted by both advisers and lone parents.

In addition to providing support and advice regarding personal circumstances, employment and training, advisers also provided lone parents with information regarding their benefit claim when asked. Queries about benefits were typically made by customers making a new claim and advisers routinely answered questions and provided information on benefit entitlement, payments and alternative benefits available. Furthermore, advisers also listened to difficulties experienced with tax credits and provided helpline numbers for lone parents to call.

Although advisers suggested providing benefit information was not officially part of their advisory role, they felt it was important to deal with any queries raised in order to put the customer at their ease and ensure they focused on the other issues being discussed.

*'I think at the very first WFI...the customer is very geared around "when am I going to get any money?" As an adviser, it's very difficult to move away from that.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area D)

### 3.2.2 Undertaking tasks or services

There were two main types of formal tasks being undertaken during the WFI: the Action Plan and the In Work Calculation.

The **Action Plan** was described by advisers as a mandatory service used to make a record of lone parents' short and long-term goals. The Action Plan was based on lone parents' employment histories and personal circumstances and any interest in NDLP or work was also noted. The service was ultimately said to be used to drive cases forward and in some instances lone parents were provided with a copy to take away:

*'Within the Action Plan, we ask them [lone parents] what their qualifications are and what their employment history is and then their personal circumstances; find out how many children they've got, ages, and whether they've got any health problems. Then we pitch into are they looking to return to work, or training at this time, and discuss any barriers they may have [to moving into work].'*

(LP adviser, female, Area D)

Typically, lone parents tended not to be aware that a specific Action Plan had been conducted during the WFI. However, they did mention having 'catch ups' and general discussions about their future with information being recorded on the computer by advisers. Overall, lone parents were receptive to the Action Plan or general catch up (as they described it), as they found it enjoyable to talk about their current situation.

In contrast, Action Plans were viewed less positively in cases where the lone parent perceived the adviser to be attempting to set work-based goals. For example, one lone parent felt that her adviser had persisted in promoting the possibility of placing her children in a nursery while she worked, despite her stating that she wanted to look after her children at home until September of that year. This experience had made the lone parent nervous about attending her next WFI.

The **In Work Calculation** was noted by advisers and lone parents and was described as a means of demonstrating the financial benefits of moving off benefit into work. Calculations were conducted using either accurate information provided by the lone parent regarding potential salary levels or more commonly, using the minimum wage and standard costs for expenses such as, transport and childcare. Other financial assistance, such as the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF), tax credits and the Back to Work Bonus were also said to have been factored into the calculations.

Reactions to the tool by advisers were mixed: it was seen by some to provide tangible information about the financial effect of working, which lone parents could use to make an informed decision about gaining employment. Moreover, where it showed that the individual would be better off, it was also seen as encouraging. In one instance, it was said that the calculation suggested the respondent would be approximately £140 better off and this resulted in them viewing the idea of working in a more positive way:

*'It's a useful tool because...you can say to anybody "you will be better off in work", but when it's down in black and white and you have given them a break down of how much tax benefits they are going to get, how it might affect their housing costs, like housing benefit, council tax benefit...what they would be entitled to if they took the job...it is there for them to see.'*

(LP adviser, male, Area B)

In contrast, others felt it could be misleading – especially where the calculation was based on the minimum wage rather than on specific figures; and it was also said to discourage lone parents (sometimes unnecessarily) as a result of the outcome, which it was suggested was not always favourable (especially if it was only based on part-time employment), or sufficiently high to be deemed worthwhile. Advisers suggested that lone parents viewed £40 as a suitable amount to be better off per week as a result of working. For example, an In Work Calculation conducted on behalf of a lone parent in Area A had suggested that she would be £20 better off in a minimum wage job but was unwilling to work for this increase in income<sup>5</sup>.

Lone parents also highlighted instances when the calculation outcome was not favourable and others exhibited a lack of trust in the tool to provide accurate information.

---

<sup>5</sup> Collins *et al* (2006), *Lone Parents and Work: developing new survey measures of the constraints and choice*.

Lone parents did not tend to consider possible future career progression and increases in wages when thinking about In Work Calculation figures, primarily as it was often deemed unlikely that the employment opportunities discussed, would see earnings increase significantly in the future as a result of the nature of the work which paid minimum wage or slightly above.

### 3.3 Advisers' approach to the Work Focused Interview

Although the WFI usually incorporated a number of core activities, such as the mandatory Action Plan and a discussion of personal circumstances and future work plans, the specific structure of the interviews tended to differ. Advisers adopted a flexible and sensitive approach, drawing on and including a variety of components in any given interview. In this sense interviews were not seen as being standard, rather they were tailored by advisers according to their perception of the needs of the lone parent:

*'It's not a standard interview is it; you have to market your interview to the client.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area A)

When considering their approach advisers were generally guided by three key factors:

- **job-readiness and interest in work** – Perceptions of job-readiness and the level of *'real interest'* demonstrated in employment by lone parents, impacted on the approach adopted, with WFIs only really focusing on moving into the labour market with those customers who exhibited an interest;
- **reaction to the WFI** – Advisers' perception of how comfortable lone parents were during the WFI and the ease with which they discussed issues also affected their approach. Advisers were keen to settle lone parents into the WFI environment by establishing rapport and making sure lone parents felt comfortable. It was felt achieving this could take a number of WFIs, especially in cases where the lone parents had confidence issues; were unfamiliar with Jobcentre Plus; or were currently dealing with sensitive personal issues; and
- **the age of their youngest child** – Those whose youngest child was approaching 14 years of age tended to experience a more direct approach to WFIs involving discussion of the transition from benefits to work. This was in order to prepare them for when their youngest child reached 16 years of age and the ability to claim as a lone parent would no longer be possible:

*'I was informed that when my youngest was fourteen, which will be next year, then I will have to attend more interviews, I think possibly [every] six months, and there will be more, not pressure, but there will be some expectation that I start work at that stage, or looking more actively for work.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area D)

Overall, the approach taken to the WFI was viewed positively by lone parents, who overwhelmingly appreciated the informal, sensitive and flexible approach adopted by advisers. For the most part lone parents suggested they did not feel pressurised as a result of the interview and did not feel they were expected to return to work, which was described as a relief by those who felt they were not ready to secure employment at this juncture.

Notwithstanding this, more exceptionally, lone parents criticised the process as a result of feeling under pressure to secure employment or uncomfortable as a result of being asked to discuss personal issues, such as their health in an open environment such as a Jobcentre Plus office. Moreover, the requirement to attend the interview, despite making it clear at previous meetings that they had no intention of working in the near future, angered some lone parents, primarily as a result of the difficulties experienced travelling to the Jobcentre Plus office accompanied by young children:

*'Every time I've been it's the same old things. They want to know whether I want to go back to work... basically once I said that I don't want to go back to work at the present, it's been like "well we'll see you in another six months". So I mean from here it is a way to travel to the Jobcentre and back again, especially with two kids, just for them to ask that question.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)

### 3.4 Invitation to participate in New Deal for Lone Parents

Importantly, advisers suggested they did not tend to explicitly invite lone parents to participate in the NDLP programme during the WFI and certainly lone parents did not tend to recall being asked to participate by advisers. Although aspects of the NDLP programme were mentioned by advisers, such as the In Work Calculation or training, NDLP was not usually being marketed to customers as a unified package:

*'We don't actually mention the New Deal.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area A)

The decision not to invite lone parents to engage in the NDLP programme was usually made consciously by advisers and three main reasons were given for this:

- **The intangible nature of the programme** – NDLP was not perceived as being a tangible programme to sell to customers and as a result, advisers feared that outlining details of the programme and inviting them to participate would simply confuse and discourage lone parents from engaging with the WFI or any of the discrete elements of NDLP that might be appropriate.



- **The image of New Deal** – The link between NDLP and the other New Deal programmes was seen as potentially off-putting, as a result of the perceived negative image associated with these. This negative image was primarily associated with the mandatory nature of New Deal and advisers were concerned this might impact on the relationship established between advisers and the lone parents, for example, resulting in a loss of trust. Importantly, where aspects of NDLP were offered to lone parents, advisers were keen to emphasise the voluntary nature of their engagement; and

*'New Deal is confusing because you've got New Deal for Disabled People, you've got New Deal for Partners, you've got New Deal 18-24, you've got New Deal 25 Plus...perhaps they've got brothers, ex-partners, sisters in [on these programmes]. A lot of that is mandatory...you don't want anything to do with that, that's a totally different New Deal, but that's what they've seen, so perhaps by mentioning New Deal under this heading...you've got the stigma.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area A)

- **The inappropriateness of the programme** – In some cases NDLP was perceived as not meeting the immediate needs of the lone parents. This was said to be a result of the personal circumstances of the lone parent, which meant they would not benefit at that point in time. For example, where lone parents had pressing and immediate problems such as a disrupted family life, ill-health or problems receiving benefits, advisers felt that it was important to deal with these issues before broaching the subject of NDLP or employment.

*'If you've got someone who's making a new claim to Income Support, they're newly separated from their partner, a domestic split, there's no way they're in any mindset to be able to look for work. They don't want work, their life has just fallen to pieces...so we're looking at them, sorting their benefits out, making sure their tax credits are sorted out for them, advising them that we're here as a service.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area A)

For others, the content of the programme was simply not thought to meet their immediate requirements. This was especially true for those who were already engaged in education or training, or those who had firm ideas about their career aspirations and required specific training to move them towards these (that Jobcentre Plus was unable to provide).

### 3.4.1 Awareness and knowledge of NDLP

The awareness and knowledge exhibited by lone parent customers regarding NDLP was limited and even in cases where they were aware of the name, they were usually unable to recall any specific aspects. In some instances, this lack of awareness and knowledge also extended to the mandatory New Deal programmes, such as ND25+:

*'I don't really understand it [NDLP] to be honest. I don't know, I don't know what it means, I just thought it was the same as the Income Support benefit because I don't get any more or any less than other people that are on Income Support anyway so I don't know.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area A)

It is reasonable to assume that this low level of awareness and understanding is in part linked to the absence of an explicit invitation to participate by advisers. However, it also suggests that the programme suffers from a more general low profile, especially given that lone parents generally did not even recognise the name.

When findings relating to the lone parents' awareness and knowledge were explored with advisers, they overwhelmingly agreed and suggested they would not expect lone parent customers to be familiar with the programme, primarily as they tended not to raise the issue, but also as a result of a general lack of marketing around the programme. Indeed, advisers suggested that even they failed to have a complete understanding of NDLP as a result of the intangible nature of the programme and the continuing flux of the programme and its content.

Where awareness was noted by lone parents, it tended to relate to an awareness of particular aspects of NDLP, such as the ADF. There was also awareness of mainstream services, such as the In Work Calculation and advice on Working Tax Credit. Perhaps unsurprisingly, awareness was most pronounced amongst those who had experienced a number of WFIs. In light of advisers' views regarding the image of New Deal *per se*, it was interesting to note that where awareness of New Deal was exhibited, lone parents tended not to view this concept negatively.

## 4 Reasons for non-participation in New Deal for Lone Parents

DWP records indicate that 17.46 per cent of eligible lone parent customers choose to participate in NDLP and according to previous survey findings, lone parents are often unable to provide clear reasons for this. This chapter of the report explores reasons for non-participation, from the viewpoint of lone parent customers and LP advisers. It begins with a discussion of key overarching issues and then looks in detail at the specific reasons given for non-participation by respondents and the implication of these for NDLP. Finally, views on the principle of NDLP are considered:

- Lone parents had not usually engaged in an active decision making process regarding participation at the time of the WFI as a result of the absence of an invitation.
- Lone parents found it difficult to consider the idea of participating in NDLP in isolation from their views of employment, no matter how much they were encouraged to separate these.
- Advisers' definitions of what constitutes being on NDLP varied and this resulted in the existence of a 'grey area' regarding the definition of participation. Approaches to setting the marker on the LMS were also inconsistent.
- A wide range of reasons for non-participation were highlighted, including: a lack of awareness; attitude towards parenthood; views regarding childcare; cultural factors; financial concerns; personal circumstances; practical issues; and the content of NDLP.
- Importantly, the views of advisers and lone parents regarding non-participation tended to align and advisers argued that reasons given by lone parents were salient.
- Multiple explanations for non-participation were given and they tended to overlap and work to reciprocally impact on one another.

- Certain reasons given for non-participation were more fixed and insurmountable than others. Generally, attitudes towards parenthood and personal circumstances were non-negotiable.
- Views regarding the relevance of NDLP tended to link to a customers' job-readiness, with those at either end of the spectrum being more resistant to engaging in the programme.

## 4.1 Overarching issues

As lone parents had tended not to receive an explicit invitation to participate in NDLP by advisers (see Section 3.4), they had not usually engaged in an active decision making process at the time of the WFI regarding whether or not to participate in NDLP. As a consequence, discussions regarding reasons for non-participation undertaken as part of this research, tended to be based on an immediate consideration of their views, rather than on recall of prior decision making processes.

Furthermore, when lone parents were asked to consider reasons for non-participation in NDLP during the research interview, they often found it difficult to consider these in isolation from their views about employment. No matter how much they were encouraged to separate NDLP from employment; lone parents appeared to instinctively link the two.

Importantly, advisers' definitions of what constitutes being on NDLP varied and this certainly resulted in the existence of a 'grey area' regarding the definition of participation in NDLP. There were cases of lone parents engaging in activities which might be perceived as participation, such as, being caseloaded or exploring training options but not being recorded as such. Advisers were often unsure about what 'participation' meant and expressed concern about how they had personally been recording this on the system. As a result of this confusion, in some cases advisers questioned the official statistics held regarding NDLP take up:

*'I am personally not signing many people up, maybe I should be. Maybe this is why the stats are showing that there is a lack of participation.'*

(LP adviser, male, Area A)

This 'grey area' not only related to perceptions regarding what constitutes being on NDLP but also linked to the process of recording participation on the system, with advisers adopting inconsistent approaches to recording this information and setting the LMS marker. For example, rather than set the LMS marker at the point of the lone parent agreeing to participate in a NDLP activity, in some cases advisers delayed this in order to assess how the lone parent was progressing and whether they were likely to remain engaged in the programme for the longer term.

Indeed, it appears that confusion regarding participation also extended to the lone parents themselves, with some lone parents questioning whether or not they were participating, following the explanation given of NDLP at the point of the research interview, particularly those who were in regular contact with their adviser and those who had engaged in a number of the activities.

## 4.2 Key reasons for non-participation

A wide range of reasons for non-participation in NDLP were highlighted and these included: lack of awareness of NDLP; attitude towards parenthood; views regarding childcare; cultural factors; financial concerns; personal circumstances; practical issues; and the content of NDLP.

It was usual for lone parents to offer multiple explanations for their decision not to participate and although clearly certain reasons were more salient than others, reasons tended to overlap and work to reciprocally impact on one another<sup>6</sup>. For example, financial concerns associated with coming off benefit and attitudes towards parenthood were linked, as fear of financial instability was deemed more important as a result of needing to provide for the family. Similarly, concerns relating to personal circumstances, such as health problems, resulted in concerns being raised about practical issues, such as transport.

Importantly, the views of advisers and lone parents regarding non-participation tended to align and when reasons given for non-participation by lone parents were fed back to advisers, they tended to view them as being salient. Advisers queried the need for lone parents to be anything less than honest about their attitudes towards NDLP and work more generally, as a result of the voluntary nature of the programme:

*'Quite often people are quite open about it, if they don't want to work, they'll tell you, better than to make excuses about it, [they're] quite happy with the fact that they've chosen to stay at home with the children.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area D)

More exceptionally, advisers were more sceptical of the reasons given by lone parents regarding their decision not to participate in NDLP or seek employment and argued that these issues could be overcome if the inclination to work was there and if they *'really wanted to'* engage.

Key reasons given for non-participation are outlined in the following sections.

---

<sup>6</sup> Collins et al (2006), *Lone Parents and Work: developing new survey measures of the constraints and choice*.

### 4.2.1 Awareness of NDLP

Clearly the absence of an invitation to participate in NDLP impacted on lone parents' awareness and knowledge of the programme and this lack of awareness could potentially have impacted on participation, primarily because lone parents could not agree to participate in a programme of which they had no prior knowledge. Certainly, when discussing NDLP during the interviews, there was evidence of lone parents suggesting they would have been interested in a programme of this nature had they been invited, but it is not possible to gauge the real impact of this.

In contrast to this however, advisers warned against drawing conclusions linking low awareness with non-participation, as they did not believe participation would necessarily be increased in line with awareness. Certainly, reasons given for non-participation by lone parents also suggest awareness was not a key factor in the decision:

*'I think it would give a false impression to suggest that they weren't participating because they haven't been invited. That would imply that there were an awful lot of people who would have done if they knew it existed, and I don't think that is the case.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area D)

### 4.2.2 Attitudes to parenthood

Across the sample, lone parents placed a very high value on caring for and doing the best for their child(ren) and this was seen as a full-time (particularly where they had two or more children) job that took priority over all other factors. Lone parents clearly gained a real sense of pride from undertaking the parental role and for a number of respondents this role was said to define them.

*'If they [Jobcentre] had got me back into work, where would that leave the children? ...I'm doing a full time job. You know, I'm just not getting the wages that most people would do, you know, that's all. I'm doing a full-time job [caring for my children].'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)

Although parenthood was of paramount importance, how it impacted on lone parents' attitudes towards engaging in NDLP related to a number of factors, including general views and attitudes towards parenting; and more practical issues, such as the age of the child(ren) and the type of geographical area they lived in.

In some instances, lone parents held the belief that they should dedicate their time to being a parent and looking after their child(ren), rather than working towards or gaining employment and for this reason, deemed NDLP to be inappropriate at that particular juncture. These values were often said to have stemmed from the general attitudes towards parenting held by family and friends, including the views of other parents they had contact with and also as a result of experiences of their own childhood – be that a desire to emulate or reverse the approach they experienced.

For example, in some cases lone parents mentioned how important they felt it had been for their development that their parent/s had been at home to care for them; and others wanted to give their child(ren) the parental attention they had not received:

*'I like to stay with him, look after him and try and do what other mums do...I like him to know that I am here.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)

In more extreme cases, respondents described the idea of working and not staying at home as *'abnormal'* and this was usually a reflection of their peer group and personal family experiences.

Attitudes towards parenthood were affected by the age of the child(ren), with lone parents highlighting the age of their child(ren) as a reason for non-participation. Views on the appropriate age at which it becomes acceptable to consider alternative activities, such as employment, varied, with ideal ages ranging from starting nursery, through to finishing school aged 16. Certainly, lone parents often felt it was inappropriate where they had younger children (either at nursery or primary school), as they identified these years as formative.

The type of area in which lone parents lived also impacted on views regarding approaches to parenthood, with those perceiving themselves as living in deprived or *'rough'* areas identifying a greater need to dedicate time to caring for their child(ren), in order to prevent them from having to travel home from school or stay in the house alone, while they were at work.

### **4.2.3 Attitudes to childcare**

Views about childcare and childcare facilities impacted on lone parents' decisions not to participate and these were closely linked to attitudes towards parenthood more broadly.

Concerns often related to the idea of having a *'stranger'* look after your child as it was felt no matter how qualified the childminder, they would not care as effectively as the parent. Childminders, it was said would simply not have the same feelings for the child(ren) as a parent and would be unable to develop the same type of bond:

*'They [children] are my flesh and blood, and no disrespect to nannies and schools, but they are not going to have the same feeling for your kids that you do...they won't have the same rapport with them.'*

(Lone parent, male, Area B)

Advisers attempted to deal with lone parents' negative feelings about using childcare and encourage them to view childcare as a way of facilitating work. They did this by trying to draw attention to the training childcare providers must undertake, the proximity of facilities, the high quality of facilities and that not having to care for their child(ren) all day would be free-up time for lone parents. However,

advisers suggested that they found this reason for non-participation particularly difficult to negotiate and overcome. Indeed, lone parents were described as being *'unmovable'* on this subject, as a result of placing such value on providing the best care for their child(ren):

*'One of the issues is obviously childcare and I think it's, no matter what you say, if they don't want their child to be looked after by anybody else but themselves, then you've got a problem. You can't get over that problem, no matter how much you try.'*

(LP adviser, male, Area A)

More practical issues were also raised about childcare facilities: poor quality facilities and incompetent staff were cited as the reasons for not wishing to place child(ren) in childcare facilities. These negative impressions were usually based on lone parents' personal experiences; the experiences of family and friends; or on media reports, such as, television programmes and national newspaper articles. The key concern in terms of childcare was said to be able to trust that their child(ren) would be properly looked after.

Concerns about the financial cost of childcare were also raised, particularly where they had more than one child. Indeed, where lone parents had no concerns in principle about using childcare the costs and location of facilities could be perceived as preventing use of childcare. Fears about the cost of childcare were not always based on lone parents' direct experience of facilities. While, there were those who had looked into the cost of local childcare, others based their views on the experience of friends and family.

#### **4.2.4 Benefits and employment culture**

Advisers were keen to stress the impact of cultural factors on lone parents' decision making, however, it should be noted, that cultural factors were not raised by lone parents. Specifically, a culture of *'living on benefits'* was noted by advisers and it was argued that this affected lone parents' attitudes to employment and the process of moving towards this via NDLP.

It was suggested that *'living off benefits [was] a way of life'* in some cases, not only for lone parents, but also for their family and friends, who it was said reinforced these cultural values. Importantly, there was said to be no *'stigma'* attached to claiming benefits in these communities and these shared values were thought to make it more difficult for the lone parent to escape the benefits culture.

Moreover, advisers suggested that lone parents who exhibited these values, tended to be unable to identify the positive benefits of working, and employment was viewed as being personally unfulfilling; unlikely to improve your financial situation; and unnecessary in terms of making social links outside the family. Indeed, in these cases the need for lone parents to make social links was seen as less pronounced, as close friendships and support networks usually already existed in the community



and this alleviated any issues of isolation or boredom. For example, one respondent explained how she was content living on benefits as a result of having her mum and sister living close by and two friends who were also lone parents:

*'There's such a large number of similar age lone parents with similar age children, that they haven't got the boredom of "I'm at home all day stuck with the child", they've got like a little network of friends, they're round each others houses for coffee, to the park, they don't have that drive to go and try to find something else because it's quite nice up the road, they're happy with their lot and they're not on their own.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area D)

#### **4.2.5 Financial concerns**

Non-participation in NDLP could also be linked to fears about financial instability that could ensue following a change in benefit status, for example following a move to part-time or full-time employment. Making the transition from benefits into work was seen as a *'big step'* for lone parents, particularly those who had been claiming benefits for a number of years and those who had never worked.

In terms of the transition, fears were often less about losing IS and more about the impact it would have on other benefits, such as HB or CTB, the former of which was deemed to be extremely important to the security of the family. These concerns were often based on past experience of making the transition to work and for others, they had simply heard indirectly about possible problems from friends and family. For example, one respondent explained how they had previously experienced a delay in receiving their HB when they started work, which resulted in them experiencing difficulties paying their rent and being threatened with eviction. Concerns regarding the reliability of the tax credit system were also raised, particularly relating to either not being paid or receiving overpayments.

Leaving behind the security of benefits payments and managing their own finances was also a worry for lone parents, especially, where they completely lacked experience of managing their own finances or where they had attempted it in the past, for it only to cause difficulties and make them feel insecure.

There was also a view expressed by lone parents that they would actually be financially better off on benefit than working, unless they worked full-time in well paid employment and this certainly dissuaded them from considering part-time employment. In Work Calculations were said to have confirmed these fears in some cases, and this was also acknowledged by advisers (see Section 3.2.2):

*'I'd read things [at the Jobcentre] that they'd wanted to get lone parents back into the workplace and, you know, but sometimes when you looked at it, it wasn't worth getting a job for the pay what you were getting, and in some instances you were going to be worse off than you were on the benefits.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area C)

Concerns were also raised about frozen debts and how they would manage financially if these were to be reactivated if they moved off benefit. Furthermore, lone parents were put off by the idea that reclaiming benefit (if employment did not work out) would be arduous.

#### 4.2.6 Personal circumstances

A number of personal issues and circumstances were raised by lone parents and advisers regarding reasons for non-participation in NDLP. These were wide ranging and included the following:

- **Ill-health** – As outlined in Section 2.1.1, a number of lone parents in the sample described themselves as being in poor health; physical and mental health issues were noted. In these cases, lone parents were often unsure about their ability to work and therefore, deemed programmes such as NDLP to be unsuitable. One respondent in Area A explained how they were unable to consider employment, as a result of a brain condition which had forced them to give up work. Health problems experienced by their child(ren) were also noted (see Section 2.1.1) and these were also given as reasons for non-participation.
- **Divorce or separation** – Separating from a partner and associated experiences were said to have caused a great deal of stress and upset for families, including both for the lone parent and the child(ren). These situations had often resulted in the respondents experiencing both physical and mental health problems, which prevented them from engaging in NDLP at that time. Moreover, it was also said to have negatively affected the child(ren), either resulting in illness (again either physical or emotional), which the respondents suggested required them to devote much of their time to making the child(ren) feel confident and building a stable family life. For example, one lone parent explained how their ex-partner had attempted to illegally take custody of her two children and as a result had destabilised the family.

Divorce or separation also resulted in lone parents having to claim benefits for the first time. This could be a difficult and unfamiliar experience requiring adjustment and a period of acclimatisation before engagement with NDLP could be considered.

- **Confidence and job-readiness** – Lack of confidence and perceived levels of job-readiness made lone parents feel hesitant about embarking on a programme that moved them towards employment. Lack of confidence and views about job-readiness were often intertwined and linked to other personal circumstances or events, such as separation from a partner, or lack of work experience, skills and qualifications. A lack of basic skills was also seen as a barrier. For example, one lone parent who had not worked since having her two children was worried that the labour market had changed and that her lack of IT skills would prevent her from finding employment:

*'I haven't been in work for like quite a long time...I had been in work in the factory for nine years, so I just feel like I'm a bit behind, everything now is like computers and things...I don't think I'm updated with all of them.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area A)

- **Moving home** – Awaiting a move or being in the process of moving was said to impact on decisions regarding participation, as it was deemed pointless to embark on a programme and look for work, if a move to another area was imminent. This was particularly the case where they were being moved by the local authority and were unsure of the location. For others, the process of moving was simply found to be unsettling and they wanted to wait until they had a permanent base, before considering any other changes:

*'We just talked about getting back to work, and I explained to her that we're moving and I didn't want to get settled in a job and then have to move, because we could end up anywhere.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area D)

- **Specific career aspirations** – In a number of cases (especially where respondents had qualifications or significant work experience), lone parents held quite specific career aspirations and rather than simply seeking a job, they aimed to secure a longer-term career that would offer progression and sufficient income to comfortably support their family. Importantly, they tended not to believe that these goals could be met by Jobcentre Plus. For example, a lone parent who held a degree suggested she did not want to take a job that would only pay a minimum wage and would not be in her chosen field.
- **Currently studying** – Participation in NDLP was deemed inappropriate for those already engaged in training schemes, this group already saw themselves as moving towards employment, without the support of Jobcentre Plus. In addition to this, it was also seen as being impractical to undertake training, care for their child(ren) and simultaneously engage in NDLP. Taking part in NDLP was not ruled out, however, as a method of helping them to find employment on completing their studies.
- **Drug/alcohol abuse** – There were LP advisers who felt that in some cases, lone parents' use of drugs and alcohol precluded their participation. This was mainly said to be an issue in more urban areas. Perhaps unsurprisingly, lone parents did not identify themselves as having alcohol or drug problems.

#### 4.2.7 Practical issues

Two main practical issues were also raised regarding reasons for non-participation; these included transport and childcare facilities (including those offered in school). It was argued that neither service could be viewed as a serious option for use when working or indeed when attending WFIs, as they tended to be too expensive and rather erratic and unreliable.

For example, despite being given a list of childminders in the area, one lone parent explained how in the absence of having a car or suitable bus services, they were unable to afford the taxi fare required to reach the childminder. Even with a car, working was not necessarily seen as practical because of the complex nature of their journeys. For example, a lone parent in Area D needed to take his three children by car through 'atrocious' traffic to two different schools at opposite ends of his town. His round trip of ten miles a day, twice a day was seen to be incompatible with work.

#### 4.2.8 NDLP content

The content of NDLP did not tend to be spontaneously mentioned as a reason for deciding not to engage with the programme. Again, this might be a reflection of the limited awareness and knowledge expressed by participants.

Where the content was discussed, it was generally seen as being rather irrelevant, as 'other' more salient reasons and considerations usually overshadowed their decision, such as, their attitudes towards parenthood. Exceptionally, the content of NDLP did contribute to lone parents' decisions, and this was usually in cases where the respondent had previously looked into the services available from Jobcentre Plus (in order to move towards specific goals) and found them to be wanting.

### 4.3 Implications for New Deal for Lone Parents

**Figure 4.1 Distance from the labour market**

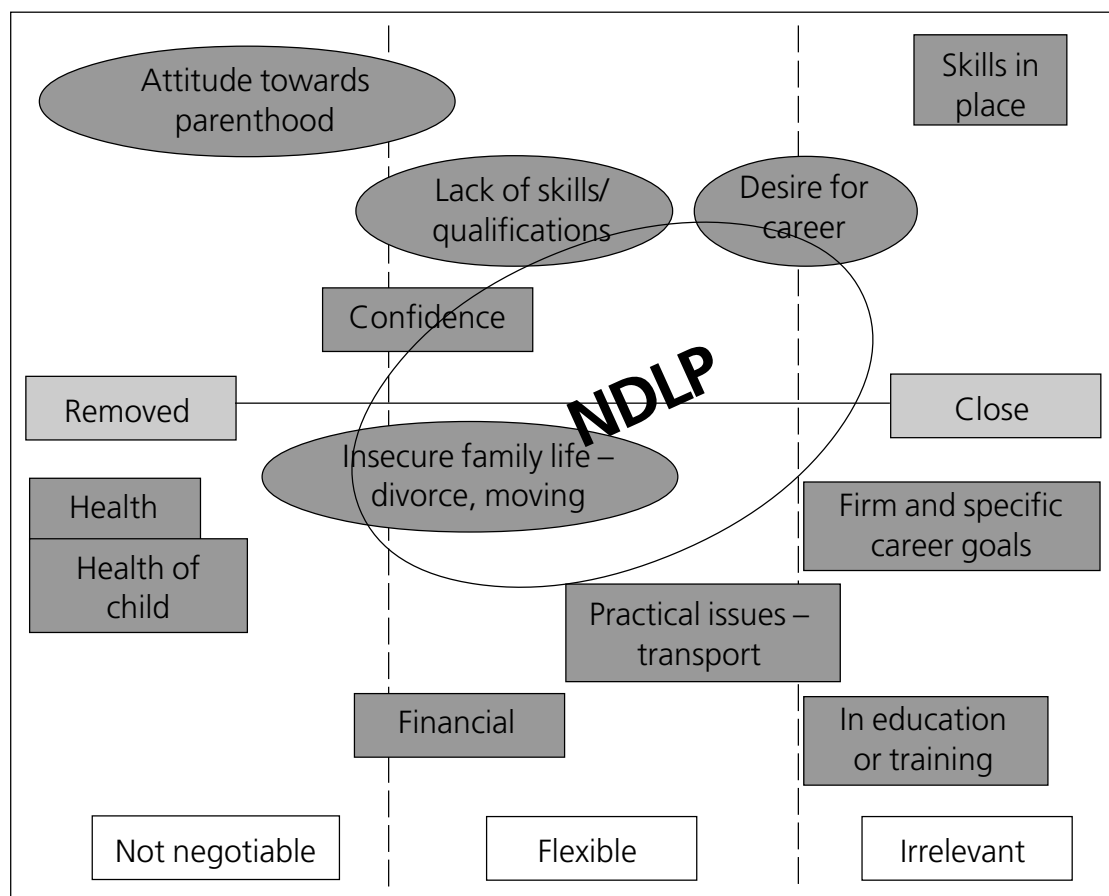


Figure 4.1 outlines distance from the labour market and reasons for non-participation link into this.

The job-readiness of lone parent respondents in our sample varied and can be described as being on a continuum between those who were close to the labour market – in terms of their perceived skills and circumstances, and those who were more removed at the point of the interview. As perceived job-readiness also tended to be linked to decisions regarding participation in NDLP, this continuum can also be seen to reflect the likely distance to engaging in NDLP.

It is clear that decisions concerning job-readiness and non-participation in NDLP were the result of multiple, overlapping factors, such as those outlined in Section 4.2. However, how negotiable and flexible these decisions were very much depended on where the lone parent was on the continuum regarding job-readiness and the types of reasons given for non-participation, with certain reasons and issues appearing to be more fixed and insurmountable than others.

As can be seen in Figure 4.1, reasons given such as attitudes towards parenthood and personal circumstances tended to be seen as fixed and non-negotiable. For instance, those experiencing ill-health; an insecure family life; or a strong sense of the need for parents to remain at home to look after their child(ren), were unlikely to be interested in participating in NDLP.

Similarly lone parents at the other end of the continuum, who deemed themselves job-ready (or thereabouts) and had firm and developed career goals and/or very specific training needs (see Section 4.2.5 and 4.2.7), also tended to be quite fixed regarding their willingness to participate. However, this was usually due to a belief that Jobcentre Plus would be unable to provide the support and help they needed, including the required training or type of jobs they were looking for.

However, those respondents who focused more specifically on issues such as: lack of confidence, financial concerns; lack of skills and qualifications; and practical issues, appear to be more flexible regarding their decision and although these were highlighted as issues to overcome, these seemed to be more surmountable, compared to issues such as attitude towards childcare for example.

This perhaps raises implications for NDLP, primarily the remit of NDLP and the type of lone parents (based on their circumstances) likely to be receptive to the programme.

#### 4.4 Views on the principle of New Deal for Lone Parents

As part of the research interview, lone parents and advisers were also asked to consider their views on the principle of NDLP *per se*, considering what they liked or disliked about the programme, based on either their prior knowledge or on information outlined at the time of the interview.

A number of positive aspects of NDLP were highlighted and these included:

- **introducing the idea of work** to lone parents and encouraging them to focus on the future while maintaining the voluntary nature of NDLP;
- **helping job-ready lone parents** who want to work make the transition to employment via adviser support. In particular, the financial assistance offered was seen to be important, such as, being paid benefits for the first month of work; receiving help with buying work clothes; and paying for childcare.

Interestingly, the importance of focusing NDLP on those who were willing to work, was noted, as it was felt to be wasteful to focus on those who had little intention of working. In addition to this, it was also suggested that NDLP would be more successful targeting younger parents with fewer children, as they would be in a better position to benefit from the service:

*'It will give you... a good hand if you want to go to work, they will do what they can to sort of make it easier for you and you know, top up your finances and just make work more appealing. But I do think you have really got to want to work before you try and get on it because otherwise, you are just going to have all these things wasted on you.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area C); and

- **offering consistency of adviser contact**, which, it was felt, developed rapport and understanding between advisers and lone parents, which in turn resulted in progression and development:

*'If you have somebody [LP adviser] that's the same all the time, so you don't have to keep going over and over things, they know... how you are progressing and stuff... I think that would boost a lot of people's confidence.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area D)

Despite these positive views regarding the principle of NDLP, they were not generally seen as being sufficient to encourage participation.

In contrast to the positive aspects, one key criticism was levelled by advisers and this related to a perceived lack of resources for NDLP available within Jobcentre Plus which it was felt undermined the programme. Resources were seen as being reduced to such a degree, that one adviser failed to comprehend how NDLP could still be seen as high priority:

*'I can't understand why New Deal For Lone Parents is still high priority... we haven't got very much provision under New Deal Lone Parent any more and that's what makes a mockery of the whole system.'*

(LP adviser, female, Area D)

A lack of training was seen by both advisers and lone parents as being a particular issue and advisers were also concerned that the training available was inadequate as a result of being short-term in form and not linked to nationally recognised qualifications. Furthermore, the training available was not seen as being directly focused on the type of work desired by lone parents.

*'You get money to go down the town and get your clothes and that for work, but what about the big things, like what's wrong with me? I couldn't care less about the money for the job, to get the clothes... what about helping people get the training to go to work? That's what you need. Because me going down the town and getting a uniform isn't going to sort out the reason why I need help.'*

(Lone parent, female, Area B)





## 5 Conclusions

This final chapter of the report outlines the key conclusions in relation to the main aims of the research and also details suggestions for change as highlighted by respondents. Specifically, it explores key reasons for non-participation; communication and recording of NDLP; reasons for the previous survey findings; and lastly, the implication of the findings for the NDLP programme.

### 5.1 Key reasons for non-participation

A wide range of reasons were noted for non-participation in NDLP by lone parents, although these were often driven by the image of NDLP as a step towards employment. The reasons given for non-participation included: a lack of awareness of NDLP; attitude towards parenthood; views regarding childcare; cultural factors; financial concerns; personal circumstances; practical issues; and the content of NDLP.

Importantly, it was usual for participants to offer multiple reasons for non-participation and these should not be seen in isolation, rather the reciprocal impact they have on one another should also be considered. For example, practical issues might be given for non-participation, when actually it is the combination of these in addition to personal circumstances, such as ill-health that creates difficulties. Similarly, practical issues relating to childcare, such as the competence of staff, might be identified as prohibitive, when in reality it is the impact of these, in addition to attitudes and values regarding caring for your own child(ren), that actually drive views and behaviour.

There is no doubt that certain reasons offered for non-participation are more fixed and insurmountable and unquestionably, decisions were often underpinned by lone parents' attitudes and views towards parenthood and specifically, if and when they perceived it to be the right time to leave the home (albeit part-time) to find employment. However, it should be noted that reasons are fluid and have the potential to shift with time, and certainly are affected by the age of the child(ren).

Across the sample, lone parents placed a very high value on caring for and doing the best for their child(ren) and this was seen as a full-time job (particularly where they had two or more children) that took priority over all other factors, including securing employment. These views clearly link to the goals and aspirations highlighted by lone parents, who focus on securing and settling the family over and above other factors and for this reason, NDLP was often deemed to be inappropriate at that particular juncture.

Attitudes towards parenthood were affected by the age of the child(ren), with lone parents, highlighting the age of their child(ren) as a reason for non-participation. However, views on the appropriate age at which it becomes acceptable to consider alternative activities such as employment, varied. The number of children also had an impact, primarily as this was said to intensify the job of caring and being a good parent.

Linked to views regarding attitudes towards parenthood, was a perception of local childcare facilities and their perceived ability to care properly for their child(ren). Concerns often related to the idea of having a '*stranger*' look after their child and it was felt no matter how qualified the childminder, they would not care as effectively as a parent. More practical issues were also raised regarding childcare, such as, poor quality facilities and incompetent staff, although these were often viewed less rigidly as ultimately these were specific to particular childminders. Concerns about the financial cost of childcare were also raised, particularly where they had more than one child.

Personal circumstances, such as ill-health and unstable family situations also had a firm impact on decisions and again this linked to lone parents' goals, which prioritised the needs of the family over employment.

Other reasons, such as financial concerns and practical issues were also salient, but were perhaps more flexible and easy to manage, especially when they ceased to be coupled or intertwined with other issues, such as attitudes to parenthood, for example.

The content of NDLP did not tend to be spontaneously mentioned as a reason for deciding not to engage with the programme. Again, this might be a reflection of the limited awareness and knowledge expressed by participants.

Essentially, it was suggested by advisers that in order to effectively participate, lone parents must want to engage and ultimately, have a desire to find employment.

## 5.2 Communicating and recording New Deal for Lone Parents

In addition to lone parents actively making the decision not to participate in NDLP as a result of the reasons highlighted (for example, attitudes towards childcare or personal circumstances), the research suggests that participation rates might also have been affected by other factors, including:

- **the communication of NDLP** – The absence of an invitation to participate in NDLP could potentially have impacted on non-participation rates, as customers were not always being overtly provided with the opportunity to participate. This said, the intuitive approach adopted by advisers suggests that in cases where it was deemed to be relevant, lone parents would have been offered the service in some form, even if it was not communicated as such. It is important to note that advisers not only failed to mention NDLP based on an assessment of its relevance, but also because they did not believe it was a tangible package or product to sell to lone parents and also as they feared they would be put off by the wider image of mandatory New Deal programmes, such as ND25+;
- **the definition and recording of NDLP** – Data on levels of non-participation might also be affected by the way NDLP is defined by advisers, particularly the ‘grey area’ regarding what constitutes being on NDLP and also how this is noted on the Labour Market System, with advisers adopting inconsistent approaches to recording this information and setting the LMS marker. Clearly, the fluid and inconsistent approach adopted by advisers means there are lone parents engaging in aspects of the programme but not recorded as such. Advisers acknowledged this, and expressed concerns and confusion regarding how to define participation.

### 5.3 Understanding the previous quantitative survey findings

A previous quantitative survey<sup>7</sup> conducted in 2003 suggested that almost two-thirds of the survey sample were unable to provide reasons for their decision not to participate in NDLP and although it is not possible to provide grounded reasons for these results, this study does offer some explanation for this.

Importantly, this research showed that due to the lack of an explicit invitation to participate made by advisers during the WFI, it was quite usual for lone parents not to have engaged in an active decision making process regarding participation in NDLP. Furthermore, as awareness and knowledge of the programme tended to be minimal, it is possible that prior to being asked about participation during the previous quantitative survey, respondents had not previously considered the prospect of engaging in NDLP and therefore, not formulated a reason.

In terms of the factors noted in the survey which are said to differentiate between participation and non-participation in NDLP<sup>8</sup>, such as, a short claim history and a ‘better off in work’ attitude, it is clear from this research that all these factors do, in some way, contribute to lone parent customers’ decisions regarding NDLP. Primarily, these factors impact as they affect lone parents’ job-readiness and confidence,

---

<sup>7</sup> *‘NDLP Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey’*, by Lessof, C. et al (2003).

<sup>8</sup> Outlined in Section 1.1.

which this research suggests is inextricably linked to views regarding non-participation, is so much as lone parents view participating in NDLP in relation to employment and distance from the labour market. Importantly however, it is not only customers most removed from the labour market who choose not to participate according to this study, rather this also occurs in the case of those who are closer as a result of their attitude towards Jobcentre Plus, or as they do not necessarily identify themselves as needing support to secure employment. Therefore, characteristics of non-participation also relate to views on the possible usefulness of Jobcentre Plus in assisting with employment, as issues relating to a lack of job-readiness.

One issue to consider here is whether the link between employment and participation in NDLP can or should be severed as a way to encourage participation, or whether this simply undermines the purpose of NDLP and wastes resources as advisers suggested.

## 5.4 Implications for New Deal for Lone Parents

These findings have implications for NDLP, primarily a consideration of:

- how the programme is marketed, for example, should marketing be increased to raise awareness and knowledge of the programme in order to sell it more effectively to customers, or indeed encourage customers to seek out NDLP;
- how the programme is packaged. Should it be a complete programme packaged and marketed, or would it be preferable to deconstruct the programme in order to remove any barriers to engagement created by the image of New Deal and for example, utilise specific and appropriate aspects of it; and
- who to target. Should NDLP target the full spectrum of lone parents, or simply focus on those who have the desire to return to work in order to maximise resources.

## 5.5 Respondents' suggestions for change

Advisers and lone parent respondents made a number of suggestions for improving NDLP and encouraging participation in the programme. These tended to relate to either the information provided regarding NDLP; the content and approach of the WFI or NDLP; or to wider policy issues. These issues are outlined below:

- **Improving NDLP marketing.** It was suggested that increased marketing could raise awareness of NDLP.
- **Explain NDLP explicitly.** Understanding of NDLP was minimal and it was suggested that more information be provided to lone parents.
- **Re-brand NDLP.** Advisers were keen to disassociate the programme from other New Deal schemes, for example, changing the name of NDLP to make it more attractive to lone parents. The title '*Lone Parent Support Package*' was suggested.

- **Redesign notification to attend WFIs.** It was felt that the WFI letters should be reworded to reflect a more relaxed tone. It was thought that changing the wording would encourage attendance and result in advisers spending less time reassuring lone parents during the interview.
- **Improve information and emphasis placed on training.** Lone parents called for more information to be provided on training opportunities and more emphasis to be placed on this. For example, in comparison with discussions about employment.
- **Increased 'soft skills' training.** Training such as parenting skills, confidence building, debt counselling, money management, how to complete forms, and how to approach job interviews were suggested as useful ways of encouraging lone parents to bridge the transition from benefits to work.
- **Help those who are job-ready into work.** Providing more support to move job-ready customers into work, they saw the support on offer via NDLP as focused on preparing lone parents for work rather than actually helping them to successfully gain employment.
- **More flexibility to conduct WFIs away from Jobcentre Plus offices.** Lone parents often found it difficult to attend WFIs because of ill-health, travel issues and a dislike of the Jobcentre Plus office environment, for example, lone parents did not want to bring their child(ren) to a place with security guards and where other benefits claimants could be behaving aggressively or under the influence of alcohol or drugs. As such they and LP advisers desired more flexibility to conduct WFIs in lone parents' homes or in another '*neutral territory*'.
- **Reintroduce facilities for children.** Lone parents could be distracted from the WFIs by their children. As such, it was felt that facilities to occupy children which it was said had been removed because of health and safety concerns, should be put back into Jobcentre Plus offices in some capacity.
- **Simplify financial help available.** Much of the financial assistance available via NDLP was regarded as difficult to understand. It was felt that if financial aid were simplified, greater ease of understanding would encourage lone parents to use them.
- **Make it harder for lone parents to stay on benefits.** According to certain lone parents and advisers, claiming benefit for long periods was seen as being too easy and as a result, they suggested making this more difficult as a way of encouraging participation in programmes such as NDLP. They also suggested increasing the work focus of WFIs and increasing the frequency of these.
- **Reduce fear of leaving benefits.** Organising in-work benefits and reclaiming was described as a '*minefield*', and it was felt fear of these dissuaded lone parents from attempting to move into work;
- **Encourage employers to offer family friendly employment terms,** such as flexibility and appropriate hours of employment.



# Appendix A

## Research design and conduct

### Research design

The study was undertaken in four Jobcentre Plus districts. These will be referred to as: Area A; Area B; Area C; and Area D in order to protect their anonymity. These areas were selected to provide a rural and urban mix and also as a result of a combination of two key factors: their levels of participation in NDLP and employment rate.<sup>9</sup>

The research comprised four main stages: an initial adviser stage, an observation stage, a study of lone parents and re-convened groups with advisers. These are discussed in the following sections:

#### **Stage one: advisers**

Stage one fieldwork was carried out in April 2006 and comprised **five focus groups with advisers**. One focus group was conducted in each of the areas, with the exception of Area D, where two smaller groups were undertaken. The number of advisers who participated in each area ranged from between four to eight advisers. The group discussions were conducted in the Jobcentre Plus office and lasted for approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

#### **Stage two: observations**

In each area, researchers undertook **observations of five WFIs** (20 observations). Following on from the observation, researchers approached lone parent customers and invited them to engage in a short (up to 20 minute) interview in order to explore their understanding of and views on the WFI. After this, (where possible) advisers were also interviewed and their views discussed.

---

<sup>9</sup> Area A low participation, low employment; Area B – high participation, low employment; Area C – low participation, high employment; and Area D – high participation, high employment.

In this way, it was possible not only to gain a real insight into the delivery of the programme through observation, but it also enabled the researcher to understand the experience from the perspective of the customer and adviser, consequently providing a more holistic understanding. Field notes were made during the observations and the customer interviews were recorded for analysis. Findings are integrated throughout this report.

### **Stage three: Lone parents**

A total of **80 face-to-face depth interviews were carried out with lone parents**, with 20 conducted in each area. In addition to area, quotas were also set for a range of variables, including: age; gender; age of youngest child; length of claim; qualifications; and family size. The interviews were conducted between June and July 2006 and lasted for approximately 60 minutes.

A number of research tools were used by researchers as part of these interviews, including:

- gathering background information regarding local services, to help understand and intelligently interact with lone parents during the interviews;
- a 'guided dream' to assist in the reflection of goals and aspirations; and
- vignettes and good news stories, to help lone parents recognise and discuss issues and to generate and ground the discussion. (See appendix 4).

### **Stage four: Re-convened adviser stage**

Following completion of stage three, focus groups with advisers were re-convened. This stage was undertaken with the purpose of feeding back key findings from the observation and lone parent stages of the research to advisers, in order to gather their reactions to these, but also to gain a greater understanding of the possible reasons underpinning the findings.

In total, **four reconvened groups** were created, one in each area, with between four and eight advisers taking part in each area. The groups took place in July 2006 and lasted for between 90 to 140 minutes.



## Sample profile

The achieved lone parent sample is shown below.

**Table A.1 Lone parent sample**

Area	Area D	Area B	Area C	Area A	Totals
Total number of interviews with lone parents	20	20	20	20	80
<b>Age</b>					
Under 25	5	6	7	6	24
25-44	9	8	7	8	32
45+	6	6	6	6	24
<b>Gender</b>					
Female	17	17	17	17	68
Male	3	3	3	3	12
<b>Claim history length</b>					
0-3 years	11	12	11	10	44
3+ years	9	8	9	10	36
<b>Qualifications</b>					
None	10	11	13	9	43
Some	10	9	7	11	37
<b>Family size</b>					
1 child	6	4	9	6	25
2-3 children	10	13	7	11	41
4+ children	4	3	4	3	14
<b>Age of youngest child</b>					
0 to 3 years	7	12	5	6	30
4 to 7 years	3	2	7	6	18
8 to 11 years	5	3	4	3	15
12 to 16 years	5	3	4	5	17

The achieved adviser sample is shown below.

**Table A.2 Initial adviser focus group sample**

Area	Area D (two groups conducted)		Area B	Area C	Area A	Totals
Number of advisers per focus group	4	4	4	8	8	28

**Table A.3 Reconvened adviser focus group sample**

Area	Area D	Area B	Area C	Area A	Totals
Number of advisers per focus group	4	4	7	8	23

## Recruitment

Respondents were purposively selected by BMRB's in-house team of specialist field recruiters, using the sample criteria outlined above and agreed with the DWP. Respondents were recruited from two samples provided by the DWP:

- a list of district Jobcentre Plus contacts; and
- an LMS database extract including contact details of lone parent customers who had attended a WFI within the four geographical areas selected for the research.

## Conduct of the research and analysis

All the depth interviews, group discussions and observations were undertaken by experienced qualitative researchers, using non-directive interviewing techniques. They were exploratory and interactive in form so that questioning could be responsive to the views, experiences and circumstances of the individuals involved. Interviews for each stage were guided by a topic guide developed by BMRB, in close liaison with the DWP (see Appendices B and C). Although topic guides ensure systematic coverage of key points across interviews, they were used flexibly to allow issues of relevance to respondents to be covered.

All the depth interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded in stereo. The verbatim transcripts produced from the digital recordings were subject to a rigorous content analysis, which involved systematically sifting, summarising and sorting the verbatim material according to key issues and themes, within a thematic matrix. Further classificatory and interpretative analyses were then derived from the analytic charts and these formed the basis of the findings reported in subsequent chapters.

The findings reported have been illustrated with the use of verbatim quotations, case illustrations and examples. Where necessary the details of the contributors or their subjects have been moderately changed to protect anonymity.

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to report on the range of views, experiences and suggestions reported by advisers, customers and providers. The purposive nature of the sample design as well as the sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or suggestions. Further details about the analytical procedures can be found in the appendices.

# Appendix B

## Topic guide: Advisers

45104745  
March 2006  
TG1 FINAL



**Topic Guide**  
**NDLP non-participation – Advisers**

**Overall Research Aims:**

- **To explore in detail the key reasons for non participation in the New Deal for Lone Parents programme.**

Specifically, the research aims to explore:

- Experiences, attitudes and views of the introduction to NDLP via the WFI;
- Reactions of Lone Parents to the NDLP programme and key reasons given for non-participation;
- Advisers' views on barriers and attitudes to participation and how these are managed;
- Views on the NDLP programme, specifically, how well it matches the needs of Lone Parents;
- Recommendations for how the programme or its delivery could be improved/changed; and
- Any thoughts on topics and issues to be included in the subsequent research with Lone Parents.

## INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB – independent organisation
- Project for Department for Work and Pensions
- Multi-staged project/aims of the project
- Confidentiality/tape recording
- Duration of group (60 -75 mins)

## BACKGROUND – *briefly*

- Explore characteristics of Jobcentre Plus catchment area:
  - Geographical area; rural/urban
  - Socio-economic; local labour Market
  - Types of employment available locally

- Explore respondents' role
  - Client group work with – experience of working with LPs
  - Length of time in role
  - **Brief** overview of role
  - **Briefly** explore work history

## THE WORK FOCUSED INTERVIEW – INTRODUCING NDLP

- **Explore content of lone parent WFI and review meeting**; get advisers to talk through WFI step by step

### Explore:

- General **advice and information** offered; types of issues discussed as part of the WFI;
- **Services** offered/delivered during the WFI – **probe**: in-work calculations; action plan; other
- Customers' reactions to the advice/information and services provided – what customers like/dislike about WFI
- **Information** provided to LP on **NDLP programme** – **probe**: verbal/written information provided
  - How is the programme presented/introduced to LP
  - What information are they given; what are they told at this stage; how is it sold to them
  - Explore details of the **initial reactions** to the programme by LPs; any initial **concerns/problems** highlighted
  - Explore how barriers/concerns managed/dealt with at this stage by adviser;
    - Outline any good practice
    - Outline reactions to this by LPs
    - How does lone parent reaction vary
    - What factors influence/are associated with their reaction.
- Explore **any problems** with the WFI or introduction of NDLP that might impact on initial perceptions/desire to engage with NDLP – **probe**: child care facilities; services offered during WFI; information/advice provided; content of NDLP programme; other

## LONE PARENTS: REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION IN NDLP

- Explore whether in their experience Lone Parents offer reasons for non-participation – outline details of this; whether advisers ask for reason
  - **Briefly** explore frequency and regularity
  - Explore variations in this; whether related to Lone Parent type/characteristics
- **Spontaneously** explore the reasons/barriers given for non-participation in NDLP by Lone Parents
- Explore reasons in detail – **probe on:**
  - **Content of NDLP programme**
    - Adviser contact – immediate and on-going
    - Adviser support in looking for work or training
    - In-work calculations
    - Action plan
    - Financial support in work/Tax Credits
    - Help organising registered childcare
    - Help with expenses
    - Other
  - **Personal circumstances**
    - Long claim history/not having worked in last 6 months
    - Lack of qualifications and skills – vocational, academic and practical (driving licence)
    - Age of Lone Parent
    - Age and number of children
    - Health problems
    - Care responsibilities
    - No telephone
    - Other e.g. access to transport
  - **General attitude**
    - A ‘better off claiming benefits’ attitude
    - Unwilling to accept minimum wage employment
    - Attitude/views regarding care of children
    - Attitude towards working with children
    - Other

- Explore whether reasons/barriers given differ according to Lone Parent type/demographic characteristics – provide examples and reasons for this
- Explore views on **salience/importance** of the reasons given by Lone Parents; what do they see as the main reasons/barriers identified by Lone Parents
- How **grounded** (in reality) are reasons given in their opinion – explore details and reasons for this
- Explore how barriers/concerns managed/dealt with by advisers;
  - Outline any good practice for managing barriers raised
  - Outline reactions to this by LPs; whether manage to turn Lone Parents around to NDLP
- Briefly explore key reasons for participating; what are the main reasons for participating given by Lone Parents
  - Explore whether any key differences in Lone Parent type/characteristics

## ADVISERS: REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION IN NDLP

- Setting aside reasons given by Lone Parents **spontaneously** explore why advisers feel Lone Parents do/do not chose not to participate in NDLP

### **Probe on:**

- Content of NDLP programme
- Personal circumstances
- General attitude
- Other
- Explore whether any additional/compounding reasons not considered that contribute to non-participation – **probe:** lack of awareness, knowledge and understanding; negative perception of Jobcentre Plus/NDLP; other
- Which factors do advisers perceive as being most salient/important
  - How 'real' do advisers regard barriers to participation
- Explore whether reasons differ according to Lone Parent type/demographic characteristics – provide examples and reasons for this
- Explore whether any gaps identified between reasons given for non-participation by Lone Parents and those highlighted by advisers
  - Explore reasons for these gaps
- Explore views on why some Lone Parents participate and others do not – outline reasons
- Explore thoughts on why Lone Parents are often unable to provide reasons for non participation; do this group exhibit any similar characteristics

- Explore details and views on management of these barriers; how are they managed and how effective is this – **probe:** approach of adviser; content of ND programme; information and knowledge; additional support; other

## VIEWS OF NDLP PROGRAMME

- Explore **advisers views of the NDLP programme** overall; any problems identified
  - What works well and what works less well
- Explore how far the programme currently **meets the needs of Lone Parents** – provide details
  - Outline any problems with programme as it stands
  - Outline aspects that particularly meet needs; how it benefits Lone Parents
- Explore how far programme impacts on desire to participate (***if not already discussed***); how could be resolved
- Explore perception of general views about NDLP amongst customers
- Explore views on **principle of NDLP**; especially drive to include wider range of Lone Parents

## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND CHANGE

- Spontaneously explore ideas for improving/encouraging participation in NDLP
- Explore any suggestions for change or improvements relating to:
  - WFI or review meeting e.g. timing/frequency of meetings
  - Introduction of NDLP
  - Content of NDLP programme
  - Subsequent/follow up contact with Lone Parent
- Explore suggestions for overcoming barriers/problems highlighted by Lone Parents and advisers – **probe:** general attitude; personal circumstances; awareness and knowledge; other
- Explore any actions/approaches that could be taken by advisers to overcome barriers
- Explore any additional information/marketing that could be provided
- Explore any other suggestions



## IDEAS FOR SUBSEQUENT RESEARCH

***Note to researcher: reiterate multi-staged project consisting of interviews with Lone Parent and observations/interviews in Jobcentre Plus***

- Explore the type of issues/topic would ideally like to be explored in subsequent stages of the research – **probe:** research with Lone Parent/advisers
- Explore any key information would be useful to collect ahead of the interviews – probe: local labour market knowledge; other

THANK AND CLOSE



# Appendix C

## Topic guide: Lone parents

45104745  
May 2006  
TG3 FINAL



**Topic Guide**  
**NDLP non-participation – Lone Parents**

**Overall Research Aims:**

- **To explore in detail the key reasons for non participation in the New Deal for Lone Parents programme.**

Specifically, the research aims to explore:

- Experiences and views of the WFI invitation and WFI, particularly in relation to how it impacts on NDLP participation;
- Overall reactions to the NDLP programme;
  - The decision making process regarding take up of NDLP;
  - Key reasons for non-participation/issue to participation;
- Salience of issue and reasons for non-participation;
- Methods and approaches to overcoming issues identified;
  - Impact of local information; vignettes and guided dream;
- Awareness, understanding and views of NDLP programme overall; and
- Recommendations for how the programme could be improved/changed.

***Note to researcher: Please be mindful of the sensitivities around questioning Lone Parent clients and adapt the wording of questions appropriately.***

## INTRODUCTION

- About BMRB – independent organisation
- Project for Department for Work and Pensions
- Aims of the project
- Confidentiality/tape recording
- Duration of interview (60 -75 mins)
- Report will be published – no named individuals
- Reassure that participation will not effect benefits
  - Remind that NDLP is a voluntary programme

## PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- Explore family details
  - People they live with
  - Details of children: number of children; ages of children
- Age
- Health
- Current circumstances – **probe:** claiming benefit, training/education, employment, other
- Explore **future goals** and ambitions – **probe:** non work related aspirations; employment; training; education; other
  - What activity do they see themselves undertaking in four years time
- Explore **how job ready** they feel they are; what are the key issues
- Explore **employment** history
  - Types of employment undertaken in past
  - Experiences and views of working; reasons for these
- Explore **history of claiming benefit**
  - Length of time claimed benefit for
  - Type of benefit claimed in this period (JSA, IS, IB, HB); whether changed – explore reasons
- Explore **education/training** background
  - Qualifications gained – academic and vocational

## WORK FOCUSED INTERVIEW

### Experience of WFI

- Explore details of the **invitation** to attend the WFI
  - When received invitation to attend WFI
  - Form of invitation – **probe:** letter, telephone call, other
  - Content of invitation; explore what invitation said
- Explore how well understood invitation; any problems
- Explore understanding/knowledge of the WFI; what was the purpose of attending; why had they been invited
- Explore any initial concerns about attending; reasons for these

- Explore number of time attended a WFI overall
- Ask respondent to **describe content of last WFI** in full – step by step
  - What was discussed – **probe:** personal circumstances, in/out of work benefits, employment, training/education, child care, NDLP, other
  - Any information or advice given
- Explore whether **NDLP** was discussed during the WFI
- Explore content of **discussion regarding NDLP**
  - What was discussed
  - What information/advice was provided – **probe:** verbal/written information
  - How was the programme presented/introduced by adviser
- Explore whether heard of NDLP before; explore details of this
- Explore **perceived purpose** of NDLP; main aim of NDLP programme – reasons for this
  - Whether perception affected by WFI/contact with adviser or other information gained – **probe:** media, word of mouth, other

### **Overall views of WFI**

- Explore **views on invitation** to attend WFI
  - Any reasons wanted/did not want to attend
  - Any concerns or fears
- Any **views on experience of attending the WFI** – positive and negative aspects of WFI
  - Explore how well they understood discussion and information provided; any problems
  - Explore how well adviser dealt with queries or questions
  - Explore any additional information/advice would have benefited from
- Explore **views on NDLP programme at the WFI**; benefits/disadvantages identified; reasons for these
- Explore **perceived impact of attending WFI**; now and in future

## REACTION TO NDLP PARTICIPATION\*

Note to researcher: Three tools can be used as part of this section (use as appropriate):

1. Grounded information regarding local area to explore/challenge responses
2. Vignettes/scenarios
3. The guided dream

### Views on invitation to attend NDLP

**Note to researcher: LP might not be aware of the invitation to attend. If they are not aware, probe in detail anything that relates to this and explore hypothetically.**

- Explore **understanding of invitation** to participate in NDLP; did they know they had been invited
- Explore **reaction to invitation** to participate in NDLP; how felt when asked to participate – positive/negative responses
  - Explore whether any concerns – reasons for these
- Explore **intentions** regarding participation in NDLP
- Explore **decision making process** involved; how made decision; reason for this
  - Explore main factors considered when making this decision – **probe:** future aspirations; personal circumstances; content of NDLP; general attitude; experience of WFI, other
  - Explore whether certain issues were more influential
- Explore **issue/reasons** for non-participation in detail

#### *Explore*

- Nature of issue
- Strength of issue; how they compare
- Views on whether issue could be overcome; how this could be achieved

**Note to researcher:**

- Use local information, vignettes and guided dream to help explore and challenge responses where appropriate
- Explore reactions to these challenges
- Explore impact of vignettes/guided dream on views and possible behaviour

**Guided dream:**

- Ask the respondent to consider their ideal future activity; what would they ideally like to be doing ten years from now – probe: employment, education/training; personal; other (refer back to Section 2)
- Walk LP through steps required to reach this goal; what might they need to do; how will they reach this goal
- Explore any potential issues or any difficulties and explore how these might be overcome or addressed

Explore issues in detail probing on:

- **General attitude**

- A 'better off claiming benefits' attitude
- Unwilling to accept minimum wage employment
- Attitude/views regarding care of children
- Attitude towards working with children
- Other

- **Content of NDLP programme**

- Adviser contact – immediate and on-going
- Adviser support in looking for work or training
- In-work calculations
- Action plan
- Financial support in work/Tax Credits
- Help organising registered childcare
- Help with expenses
- Other

- **Personal circumstances**

- Long claim history/not having worked in last 6 months
- Lack of qualifications and skills – vocational, academic and practical (driving licence)



- Age of Lone Parent
- Age and number of children
- Health problems
- Care responsibilities
- No telephone
- Other e.g. access to transport
- Financial
- Explore whether reasons/issue were discussed with the adviser
- Explore how issue and concerns managed/dealt with by advisers
  - Outline any good practice for managing issue raised
  - Outline reactions to this; impact of this

## THE PRINCIPLE OF NDLP

- Explore **awareness and knowledge** of NDLP overall; how they gathered this information

***If necessary read out:*** New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is a voluntary government programme aimed at helping lone parents into work by improving their job readiness, and supporting them in employment.

Everyone on New Deal gets a personal adviser who is their point of contact throughout the programme. The personal adviser takes the time to understand people – their experiences, interests and goals – so a plan can be prepared to help people into a suitable job.

- NDLP – **probe:** what like and disliked about programme
  - Whether think is a good idea or not
  - Explore whether would have taken up NDLP if had been actively invited to do so
    - Reasons why/why not
  - Explore whether would have taken up if had been given more info
    - Reasons why/why not
  - Explore whether NDLP matches respondent needs
    - Reasons why/why not
  - Explore how respondents would change NDLP programme
    - What would encourage participation
    - What would make NDLP more relevant

- Briefly explore views on why other LPs chose to participate
  - What in their view is different for non-participating LPs
- Explore the perceived impact of engaging in NDLP for them and others
- Explore **intentions** regarding participation in NDLP in future
  - What would need to occur for them to engage

## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Looking back over their experience, what could have been done differently – explore different perspectives:
  - Self
  - Jobcentre Plus/adviser
  - Others
- Explore any changes they would make to NDLP programme; what difference this would make
- What could be done to encourage participation
  - By the government
  - By the Jobcentre Plus/advisers
  - By others
  - By Lone Parents
- Any other comments/questions for the researcher

**THANK AND CLOSE**

# Appendix D

## Vignettes and good news stories

These tools were used during the interview in order to encourage the respondents to identify with the issues being discussed and to consider their own circumstances in greater depth.

### Vignettes

- Select appropriate vignette(s) and read out to LP
- Ask them to discuss the situation
  - How would they feel in this situation
  - What are the issues faced by the lone parent in the example
    - How realistic are their aspirations
    - Are there any problems or concerns
    - How could these be overcome
  - What support would you need to overcome the issues

#### 1.

Nicola lives in the countryside and has a six year old daughter called Rachel.

Nicola wants to work part-time in the secretary's office at her daughter's school. She is looking to do 16 hours a week.

She is worried because she did not have any qualifications and finds reading and writing difficult.

**2.**

Jean has two boys, Darren, seven and Michael, ten.

Jean is looking to get a job in retail and has seen a job she likes the look of advertised in her local newspaper. She was thinking about working full-time.

The shop is in town but Jean thinks travelling to the town centre might be too difficult. She is also worried that she won't be better off in terms of money working and coming off benefit.

**3.**

Michelle lives in a large city and has a son, Bryan aged three. Michelle, lives apart from many of her friends and family and feels she has little contact with anyone apart from her son.

Michelle is bored at home and wants to go back to work.

Michelle had not worked for many years and because of this did not feel confident that she would be able to work again.

**4.**

Jim has a three year old daughter called Kim.

He wants to work full-time in the building trade.

Jim thinks that starting work would be too difficult because he needs to care for Kim.

He thinks putting Kim in a nursery while he worked would be too expensive. He is also a bit concerned about what other builders will think if he has to go to the nursery after work.

**5.**

Sarah lives in the countryside and has a two year old, Ben and a baby of seven months, Tia.

She has always wanted to work in a salon, but thinks she can't work because her children are too little and need lots of care.

Sarah is also worried because she has never had a job before.

**6.**

Trisha lives in a town and has a 12 year old, Nathan.

She lives close to her sister Tracey and her best friend Gita both of whom also have young children.

Trisha is thinking about working in a newsagent close to her home, but is worried that working would mean that she would be different to Tracey, Gita and other mums living in her area.

**'Good news stories'**

- Select appropriate story and read out to LP
- Ask them to discuss the situation
  - How realistic is the situation
  - Any problems identified
  - Do they think engaging with NDLP would really help as it did for the lone parent in the example
    - What type of help would they need in this situation
    - How would they feel about doing as the lone parent did in the example

**7.**

Kayleigh has two children, seven year old Susie and five year old Robbie.

Kayleigh's mum has never worked and she thinks that a mum should be at home with her children.

After speaking to a New Deal for Lone Parent adviser at the Jobcentre, Kayleigh started to think that it would be OK for her to work even though she has children.

The adviser helped Kayleigh find a part-time job in a leisure centre that she could do while Susie and Robbie were at school.

Kayleigh still sees her children as much as she did when she wasn't working.

**8.**

Emma was not keen on thinking about work because she was worried that the move from benefits to work would be difficult. She thought it might mean that she would have money problems until her wages were paid.

After speaking to a New Deal for Lone Parent adviser at the Jobcentre, she found out about in-work benefits and the adviser did a calculation for her which showed her that she would be better off in work than on benefits.

The adviser also helped Emma find a part-time job in a college canteen for 16 hours a week.

# Appendix E

## Qualitative analysis

BMRB Social Research are always committed to producing a thorough analysis of the data and set procedures are in place to ensure analysis is undertaken in a systematic and comprehensive manner and that the findings are based on the raw data rather than on a researcher's impressions. The interviews are all transcribed verbatim and then analysed by experienced members of the BMRB team.

Material collected through qualitative methods is invariably unstructured and unwieldy. Much of it is text-based, consisting of verbatim transcriptions of interviews and discussions. Moreover, the internal content of the material is usually in detailed and micro form (for example, accounts of experiences, inarticulate explanations, etc.). The primary aim of any analytical method is to provide a means of exploring coherence and structure within a cumbersome data set whilst retaining a hold on the original accounts and observations from which it is derived.

Our method involves a systematic process of sifting, summarising and sorting the material according to key issues and themes. We use a set of content analysis techniques, known as 'Matrix Mapping', to ensure an optimum synthesis of findings from the verbatim data.

The first stage of 'Matrix Mapping' involves familiarisation with the data (in the form of the audio tapes or verbatim transcripts) and identification of emerging issues. Based on this preliminary review of the data as well as the coverage of the topic guide and the researchers' experiences of conducting the fieldwork, a thematic framework is constructed.

The analysis then proceeds by summarising and synthesising the data according to this thematic framework using a range of techniques such as cognitive mapping and data matrices. The thematic matrix comprises a series of subject charts displayed either in Word, Excel or Insight qualitative software. In this case Excel software was utilised.

Data from each interview transcript will be summarised and transposed under the appropriate subject heading of the thematic matrix. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or to extract text for verbatim quotation. When all the data have been sifted according to the core themes the analyst begins to map the data and identify features within the data: defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of phenomenon, creating typologies, finding associations, and providing explanations.

The mapping process is similar whichever of the above features are being considered. The analyst reviews the summarised data; compares and contrasts the perceptions, accounts, or experiences; searches for patterns or connections within the data; and seeks explanations internally within the data set. Piecing together the overall picture is not simply aggregating patterns, but of weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues, and searching for structures within the data that have explanatory power, rather than simply seeking a multiplicity of evidence.

The key issues, and the features that underpin them, are then used as the basis for constructing, in this instance, the oral presentation and the written report. Verbatim quotes are also used throughout in order to illustrate and illuminate the findings.

We have used, and refined, our analytical procedures over many years. They are highly respected by our clients and are noted for their ability to extract the maximum information from qualitative data. Our methods are very robust and demonstrably able to stand up to public scrutiny. They have been used, for example, in the analysis of difficult and sensitive topics and have provided the analytical structure for many high profile pieces of work.



# Appendix F

## Work Focused Interview policy information

### Work Focused Interviews

Work Focused Interviews are intended to increase participation in NDLP by making lone parents aware of the help and support available to them at the beginning of their IS claim. They were introduced in October 2000 for lone parents making new or repeat claims in three pathfinder areas, and were then introduced nationally in April 2001.

Interviews were rolled out gradually depending on the age of the youngest child and for **New/Repeat** claimants, the groups are:

- from April 2001: new and repeat claimants whose youngest child is aged five years three months or above;
- from April 2002: new and repeat claimants whose youngest child is three years or above;
- from April 2003: all new and repeat claimants.

For stock claimants, the groups are:

- from April 2001: those with a youngest child aged 13-15;
- from April 2002: those with a youngest child aged 9-12;
- from April 2003: those with a youngest child aged 5-8;
- from April 2004: those with a youngest child aged 0-5 years and three months.

Each of these is rolled out to the oldest of each age group first, so for example, in the 13-15 roll-out, those with 15 year olds were invited first, then 14, then 13 year old youngest children.

As well as the initial WFI, lone parents on IS are required to attend a yearly review meeting. From April 2002, a six-monthly review meeting is also required for all new and repeat claimants (so the first six-monthly reviews took place in October 2002).

The current regime for review meetings is as follows:

- new and repeat claimants of IS who remain on benefit are required to attend a review meeting after six months, and then again six months after that, and annually thereafter;
- lone parents attending an initial WFI as a continuous claimant of IS, and who remain on benefit are required to attend a review meeting with a PA 12 months after their initial meeting and annually thereafter.

### Quarterly WFIs

From September 2004, lone parents on IS for more than 12 months, who live within Extended Schools Childcare Pilot areas (Haringey, Lewisham and Bradford LEAs Greenwich, Leicester, Leicestershire, Sandwell, Aberdeenshire, Fife and Torfaen) and whose youngest child is aged 12 or over have been required to attend QWFIs, as a result of the availability of quality childcare. **These QWFIs will continue until March 2007.**

From October 2005, all stock customers whose youngest child is aged 14 years and over have been required to attend QWFIs, to help them prepare for the transition to JSA once their child reaches 16.