

**Is the Work Programme Working for Single
Parents?
An Analysis of the Experience of Single Parents
Moving onto the Work Programme**

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The charity works with single parents living in poverty to improve their lives. There is a membership of over two thousand including both single parent organisations and individual single parent members. There is a Study Centre which offers training courses including those for parents wanting to return to work, an online forum One Space (with around 26,500 unique visitors each month), and carries out research.

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Laura Dewar
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Summary

The purpose of this analysis was to look at the experience of single parents moving onto the Work Programme. We wanted to see whether the people delivering the Work Programme were complying with the public sector equality duty in terms of considering the need to advance equality of opportunity for single parents in relation to their sex.

The vast majority of the 1.9 million single parents in Britain are women (9 out of 10) raising nearly 3 million children. For those that have job seeking requirements as a condition of their benefits (currently those whose youngest child is aged 7 or over) it is important that their needs as parents are taken into account so the jobs that they move into are sustainable for them and their family. There are safeguards in the welfare legislation that mean that single parents' work preparation and job seeking requirements are different because they also need time to care for their children. In addition, like all public sector organisations, the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) are subject to the public sector equality duty in s.149 of the Equality Act 2010 (see Appendix A). This means they must have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity in all that they do, which includes taking steps to meet the different needs of their customers who share a protected characteristic (in this case their sex).

The Work Programme began in June 2011 to help the longer term unemployed. Although this is a contracted service from the DWP the organisations that deliver support need to comply with the public sector equality duty because they are performing a public function (the duty applies to non-public sector organisations that are carrying out public functions). The DWP must also have due regard to equality in all that it does including when it is commissioning services so should be building equality considerations into contracts where appropriate. In addition, the DWP has developed the Merlin Standard (see Appendix C) with welfare to work providers, which is intended to provide guidance and promote good practice on commissioning and includes principles on promoting and monitoring equality and diversity throughout the supply chain.

Large, usually private sector companies have contracts as 'prime contractors' but they can then subcontract to other organisations (referred to as 'providers') that can deliver the service to unemployed people. Our analysis looked at the experience of single parents transferring onto the Work Programme both in Bristol and nationally. To gather evidence we interviewed single parents in Bristol and looked at discussions about the Work Programme from Single Parent Action Network's (SPAN's) online forum One Space to establish key themes. We appreciate that this is a descriptive analysis and the single parents are not a representative sample. However, our analysis does give a snapshot of the lived experiences of single parents. We also know that the Work Programme is in its infancy and our findings are only a reflection of the experience of single parents in the first stage of the Work Programme.

In Bristol five single parents were interviewed. There was difficulty in finding more single parents to interview as the implementation of the Work Programme was delayed in Bristol. Three of the interviewees had older children (aged at least 11) whilst two single parents had much younger children (the youngest aged 1). The parents with the younger children had more issues with the transfer onto the Work Programme because little account was taken of the needs of their children. The parents with the younger children are both European Union citizens and thus have the right to work in Britain. However,

they do not have the right to receive Income Support and must be job seekers (so they were put on Job Seekers Allowance and then transferred onto the Work Programme). Although it is unusual for parents of younger children to be on Jobseekers Allowance we are finding increasing numbers of such single parents in Bristol and continue to be worried about the lack of account and support that this group is offered and the negative impact on their children.

All five of the single parents were on Jobseekers Allowance. For those that had had contact with a Lone Parent Adviser whilst at the Job Centre, this had been a positive experience and they had found the support helpful. However, none of the single parents had been told explicitly about the legal flexibilities open to single parents who were job seekers although all knew that they could restrict their hours (but were unclear how they found out about this flexibility). In particular Jobcentre Plus could not give them information about what the Work Programme would involve, nor the practical arrangements, such as how often they would need to attend or whether childcare would be provided or paid for.

Key findings in Bristol:

- None of the single parents interviewed were aware of the public sector equality duty and the requirement to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between men and women and had never seen reference to this at either the Job Centre or the Work Programme. They had no idea how they would access such a document;
- The single parents found the transfer to the Work Programme stressful due to uncertainty and lack of information;
- There was concern about childcare, for the parents with older children there was worry about what would happen to their children in the long summer holiday (when the Work Programme was introduced). For parents of younger children the Work Programme providers gave confusing and contradictory instructions as to what provision could be made for their children. Both were turned away from appointments because they arrived with their children and one was told not to bring her children again to appointments but was not given help with finding or funding childcare. Both of these parents were anxious to comply with the requirements of the Work Programme but were turned away from support. Both were concerned that they would be sanctioned if they did not attend interviews arranged by the Work Programme provider;
- The single parents with older children thought that the adequacy of tailored support depended on the adviser that you were given on the Work Programme. They felt that most of the advisers gave generic support that was not tailored to their needs and provided only general information about job seeking. However, they had come across advisers who were helpful and provided guidance on CV writing and useful website links. One single parent was content with the support she was getting on the Work Programme in particular helping her to narrow down her job search and allowing her to look for local part-time work; and
- Single parents of older children wanted to undertake further training as they had been out of the job market for some time. They were told that there was no budget for training.

Further evidence was gathered from SPAN's online forum One Space. Eleven single parents from across England discussed their experience of the Work Programme online (with 189 posts on our website about this subject) between May 2011 and November 2011.

There were five key themes, some which mirrored our findings from the Bristol interviews:

1. A lack of information for single parents moving over to the Work Programme and the anxiety that this caused especially as this coincided with the beginning of the school summer holiday. Jobcentre Plus provided few details for the parents who were transferring and what it would involve;
2. There was real confusion about what childcare would be provided and whether this would be paid for. One provider was not even aware that a single parent had a child and phoned for an interview at 6:30 in the evening, another single parent with eleven year old twins was told to bring them along to a three-hour induction;
3. There was poor organisation of appointments which could take place during inconvenient times for the parents such as at a time when they would pick up their child from school;
4. There was a concern about the lack of training opportunities on the Work Programme. Some single parents were thinking of leaving the benefit system all together to try to pursue training so that they could get work that could provide for themselves and their family; and
5. Many of the single parents were worried about the lack of job opportunities that were open to them. Although many single parents are able to restrict their hours there are few part-time job opportunities. Despite the lack of suitable jobs they were told by the providers to apply for a large volume of unsuitable vacancies.

In common with the Bristol interviewees, some of the single parents thought that there were some good advisers on the Work Programme. An examination of the Online Forum gave a good understanding of single parents' experience over a period of time. What was particularly hard was the lack of information and the fear that many had over the transfer and what the Work Programme would mean for their family. Whilst this would be frustrating for any job seeker we found an added anxiety for single parents was the uncertainty during the long school summer holiday when they wanted to be concentrating on caring for their children. As time went on some parents found that their experience on the Work Programme and the account taken of their needs was more positive than they thought it would be. However, with the patchwork of support, this is not a consistent experience across the country. Many single parents were still concerned about how they would be treated over the two-year period of the Programme and how the needs of their family would be taken into account in the future.

Single parents as job seekers

Since 2008 the transfer of single parents onto job seeking benefits has been rapid: 300,000 single parents have transferred from Income Support with a further 100,000

expected to transfer when the Welfare Reform Act is passed¹. From spring 2012, when the youngest child of a single parent reaches five, they will be expected to seek work as a condition of receiving benefits. If they remain unemployed (as will many given the current lack of work available, in particular part-time opportunities) they will be expected to move onto the Work Programme. Work Programme contractors have 'black box' contracts with the DWP and so it is unclear to the public what they must provide and how they will operate.

The public sector equality duty

In 2009 the Equality and Human Rights Commission using its powers under s.31 of the Equality Act 2006 carried out an assessment of Jobcentre Plus functions to see whether they were complying with the previous public sector equality duties². They concluded that Jobcentre Plus needed to do more in relation to race and gender equality. In terms of gender they were criticised for assuming that equal treatment will lead to equal opportunity. In subsequent DWP research into the equality and diversity training needs of Jobcentre Plus staff they also found that many staff thought that treating men and women the same equated to providing equal opportunities. Work Programme providers have a series of different tiered organisations who will undertake direct support with job seekers including single parents.

For single parents, and those organisations that represent their interests, it is unclear how DWP and Jobcentre Plus are complying with the new public sector equality duty. Jobcentre Plus have withdrawn the specialist help of Lone Parent Advisers to single parents, which was a provision that EHRC originally cited as indicating Jobcentre Plus compliance with the gender equality duty. It is also unclear at this time how services that are subcontracted to Work Programme providers will comply with the duty as there is no information regarding the equality duty in the Work Programme provider guidance from DWP and no apparent information on how providers' performance in helping people who share different protected characteristics into work will be monitored. This lack of transparency and apparent lack of accountability are exacerbated by the 'black box' approach the DWP has taken to the contracts.

We have the following recommendations to improve compliance with the equality duty:

- Jobcentre Plus should have a specific gender equality objective related to single parent job seekers among the equality objectives that it is required to develop and publish by 6 April 2012. It should also make clear how this objective has been translated into the contracts of the Work Programme providers;
- Jobcentre Plus should reconsider their plans to scrap Lone Parent Advisers. Feedback from this analysis shows the value of Lone Parent Advisers in understanding the needs of single parents in their journey back to work;
- There needs to be greater public awareness of the public sector equality duty and how DWP, Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers are meeting its requirements. The latest guidance for public sector bodies from the EHRC states, "Public bodies must ensure that the information they publish and the equality

¹ Grayling, C PQ 28th March 2011 and figures from DWP report 736 May 2010 p11.

² Prior to 5 April 2011, public authorities were subject to separate statutory race, disability and gender equality duties.

objectives they set are accessible to the public, free of charge.”

- The Equality and Human Rights Commission should make assessing DWP, Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers’ compliance with the equality duty a priority, given the concerns raised by us about how single parents’ needs are not being properly met under the Work Programme and the removal of Lone Parent Advisers whose presence the EHRC had previously concluded demonstrated compliance with the gender equality duty;
- The Work Programme providers do not have specialist single parent advisers but can call on the services of second tier expertise. Any monitoring of the effectiveness of the Work Programme should explore how the services of the specialist subcontractors have been utilised;
- The DWP needs to find ways of promoting and sharing good equality practice amongst Work Programme providers so they can learn what helps single parents most effectively;
- Single parents are identified by the DWP as a group suffering substantial employment inequalities. The DWP should have effective monitoring in place to ensure that the Work Programme is meeting the needs of single parents;
- Greater emphasis should be placed on helping employers design jobs with part-time hours and encouraging employers to advertise more jobs with part-time and other flexible patterns of employment; and
- Equality objectives must change practice on the ground both at Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme, including making sure appointments for single parents fit around their children’s needs, such as arranging them during school hours.

This analysis highlights the experiences of single parents as they move onto the Work Programme for job seeking support. Single parents are diverse but for all, as well as being a job seeker they have the responsibility of caring for their children. The public sector equality duty is a positive duty. Its purpose is to ensure public services are designed and delivered in a way that meets the diverse needs of actual and potential service users and does not disadvantage any particular groups.³ However, this analysis suggests that job-seeking services are not routinely designed with the needs of single parents in mind and they are therefore failing in their delivery.

³ The original race equality duty was introduced as a response to the Macpherson inquiry findings. following the murder of Stephen Lawrence, that the police and criminal justice system had collectively failed to provide an appropriate and professional service to one section of the community. It said it was “incumbent upon every institution to... guard against disadvantaging any section of our communities”.

1. Background

1.2 The purpose of this analysis is to look at the experiences of single parents moving onto the Work Programme both in Bristol and through evidence from Single Parent Action Network's (SPAN's) online forum One Space. We wanted to see whether the Work Programme was complying with the public sector equality duty and tailoring their services to the needs of single parents and their children. The reason we selected the subject was because we know of the increasing number of single parents who are affected by the welfare changes, including the Work Programme, and we wanted to make sure that contracted services were addressing their equality needs. Single parents are a diverse group and so the different equality strands will impact them in different ways. For the purposes of this project we concentrated on the public sector equality duty requirements in relation to gender.

1.2 To gather evidence we interviewed single parents in Bristol and looked at discussions about the Work Programme from SPAN's online forum One Space to establish key themes. We appreciate that this is a descriptive analysis and the single parents are not a representative sample. However, our analysis does give a snapshot of the lived experiences of single parents. We also know that the Work Programme is in its infancy and our findings are only a reflection of the experience of single parents in the first stage of the Work Programme.

1.3 There are 1.9 million single parents (9 out of 10 are women) raising nearly 3 million children. The majority of single parents are already in employment (57%)⁴. However, both the previous and current Government want to further increase the number of single parents in employment. The change towards job seeking requirements for single parents has been rapid; there has been a ten-fold rise in numbers of single parents with job seeking responsibilities since 2008⁵. Since 2008, 300,000 single parents have moved from Income Support to job seeking requirements⁶. With the new requirements for single parents of children over 5 years of age being introduced in the Welfare Reform Bill a further 100,000 single parents will have to look for work as a requirement of their entitlement to benefit⁷.

2. The Work Programme

2.1 Job seekers who are seen as fit to work are on put on Job Seekers Allowance. The Work Programme was introduced in June 2011 to initially help the longer term unemployed. Job seekers aged 18-24 who have been on Jobseekers Allowance for over 9 months or aged over 25 after 12 months, will be transferred onto the Work Programme. According to the Directgov website⁸ "The support you get will be tailored to your individual needs and circumstances. Your involvement in the Work Programme will last up to two years."

⁴ Gingerbread website <http://www.gingerbread.org.uk/content/365/Statistics>

⁵ Sewell L 'Take Three Days', talk to the TUC 2011.

⁶ Grayling, C Parliamentary Question 28 March 2011.

⁷ Lone Parent Obligations: Supporting the journey into work Coleman and Lanceley DWP report 736 May 2010.

⁸ http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Employment/Jobseekers/programmesandservices/DG_197781

2.2 The Work Programme is delivered for Jobcentre Plus by specialist organisations, mostly large private companies called 'prime contractors'. As prime contractors these hold the contracts with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), but do not necessarily deliver any frontline services themselves, but subcontract to 'providers'. Providers 'take care' of the JSA claimant, make initial needs assessment and should support them throughout the job seeking process. Providers have a small training and support budget that they can use to buy services for their clients from the 'specialist providers' (sometimes referred to as tier 2 providers). For the single parents in this analysis they will have contact with the providers.

3. Jobcentre Plus equality legislative requirements

3.1 Like all public sector organisations, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus are legally obliged to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and advance equality of opportunity in all that they do. Before 5 April 2011 public sector organisations had separate equality duties that covered race, gender and disability. From 5 April 2011 a single duty was introduced which covered eight protected characteristics but that still includes a duty to have due regard to advance equality of opportunity between men and women (see Appendix A).

3.2 Under the old race, disability and gender equality duties, public authorities were required to publish equality schemes setting out the actions they were taking to fulfil the duties. The DWP equality scheme for 2008-2011 is over 300 pages long. Jobcentre Plus also had a published equality scheme to cover the period 2008-2011. The gender equality action plans within these schemes include help specifically targeted to support for single parents.⁹ Under the new equality duty there is no specific requirement to publish an equality scheme instead there is just a requirement to publish equality information about service users and the workforce by 31 January 2012 and a requirement to develop and publish equality objectives by 6 April 2012. Jobcentre Plus has produced a delivery plan for 2011-12 that includes their broad equality aims (see Appendix B) and, in terms of the relationship between the DWP and stewardship of the welfare to work providers there is the Merlin Standard which includes expectations about promoting equality and diversity and monitoring compliance through the supply chain (see Appendix C). However in these documents, there is no mention of specific actions or objectives in relation to the single parent user group.

3.3 In 2009 the Equality and Human Rights Commission carried out an assessment of the Jobcentre Plus functions in the DWP, (their first formal assessment of a public body's compliance with the law, using their powers under section 31 of the Equality Act 2006),¹⁰. They looked at policies implemented between 2003 and 2008 and identified where the duties had been met and where they had not. The report concluded that although there was some good practices, Jobcentre Plus did better with promoting disability equality than race or gender equality, where it could have done more. In particular in relation to gender they were criticised for the "... assumptions that equal treatment, will automatically lead to equal opportunity rather than acknowledging that meeting the duties will sometimes require going beyond equal treatment."¹¹ Many staff thought that treating men and women the same equated with providing equal opportunities.

⁹ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/es2008-english-jcp.pdf>

¹⁰ EHRC Report 2009 <http://equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/inquiries-and-assessments/assessment-of-compliance-into-JobCentre-plus/>

¹¹ Jobcentre Plus equality legislative requirements review Gloster et al DWP Research Report 700 2010

3.4 In terms of promoting gender equality, two Jobcentre Plus initiatives were highlighted as positive for single parents and a way of demonstrating compliance with the general equality duty. These include the Local Employment Partnerships and specific support to single parents. Local Employment Partnerships are agreements between Jobcentre Plus and employers for those most disadvantaged in the labour market (single parents are highlighted as a disadvantaged group). They work with employers to ensure that they provide a supportive working environment such as by making jobs available that fit in with people's caring responsibilities. The new services offered to single parents included Lone Parent Advisers. The report concluded, "The new services for lone parents are in themselves evidence that Jobcentre Plus and DWP are taking steps to promote equality of opportunity and to meet other elements of their general duty."

3.5 Following on from the EHRC investigation the DWP commissioned further research to establish where Jobcentre Plus could improve their public sector equality duty compliance¹². They commissioned a study to look at whether staff in Jobcentre Plus understood and were supported in meeting their legislative requirements. They found from their research that most interviewees viewed equality and diversity as important. However only a few staff could name elements of the equality duty whilst others knew some facets of equality and diversity. They also concluded that many staff were unsure of the concept of treating people differently to meet their different needs and achieve equal opportunity, and some discussed how the legislation meant they had to treat everyone the same. Staff also found it difficult to find time for training and looking up guidance as their work was very target focused.

3.6 However since publication of the EHRC investigation there have been two changes that may have an impact on the EHRC Report conclusions. First, for longer term unemployed who transfer onto the Work Programme it will be up to the providers to establish the links with local employers and establish partnership agreements. It has already been highlighted that many providers will not have the established links with employers and that these will take some time to build up¹³. The second change is the decision to no longer have Lone Parent Advisers in Jobcentre Plus and the 'black box' approach to contracts for the Work Programme that means there is no requirement for providers to have Lone Parent Advisers. Lone Parent Advisers were originally put into Jobcentre Plus to support single parents on Income Support. As more single parents have moved on to JSA they are not offered the help of Lone Parent Advisers and must see a general adviser like any other claimant. Jobcentre Plus has made the decision to scrap Lone Parent Advisers. General Advisers are seen to provide proper support to all their customers.

3.7 As part of our analysis we have asked the EHRC what further work they have undertaken in response to the earlier criticisms of Jobcentre Plus' compliance with the equality duties, and they confirmed that they would not be undertaking further action. They have since updated their website to state that: "The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) provided the Commission with an interim report of progress against the improvement plan at six months, and a final report after 12 months. The Commission was satisfied with the reports it received and the commitments made by the DWP to ensure

¹² Gloster et al DWP Jobcentre Plus Equality Legislative Requirements Review. Research Report 700 2

¹³ Welfare to Work Conference 19th November 2011 Business Design Centre. Seminar on implementation of the Work Programme.

that the lessons learned from the report have been acted upon.”¹⁴These are not public documents so it is difficult to tell what assurances have been made and what actions were agreed.

4. Looking at the experience of single parents in Bristol moving onto the Work Programme

4.1 A priority of the project was to look at the experience of single parents who had transferred onto the Work Programme in Bristol. We hoped to interview up to 10 single parents. The single parents were to be self-selecting being drawn not only from those parents that attend our charity study centre but also across Bristol. A flyer was produced to attract single parents that was distributed across local single parent groups including Children’s Centres, the Citizens Advice Bureau and at the Single Parent Fair held in Bristol in October 2011. Despite the broad distribution of the flyer there were still a limited number of single parents that applied to be interviewed. This is partly due to the delays in Bristol of people transferring over to the Work Programme.

4.2 The interviewees were offered either face-to-face interviews or an interview over the telephone. In addition single parents who participated had to provide copies of the information provided to them about the Work Programme. Each participant was given a thank you shop voucher of £20 for his or her time. The questions related to their experiences of Jobcentre Plus and transfer to the Work Programme with specific reference to the public sector equality duty. A list of the questions can be found at Appendix E.

4.3 In Bristol five single parents were interviewed. Three of the interviewees had older children (aged at least 11) whilst two single parents had much younger children (the youngest aged 1). All five of the single parents were on Jobseekers Allowance. The parents with the younger children are both European Union citizens and thus have the right to work in Britain (they were both interviewed in their first language). However, they do not have the right to receive Income Support and must be job seekers so they were put on Job Seekers Allowance and transferred onto the Work Programme. Although it is more unusual for parents of younger children to be on Jobseekers Allowance we are finding increasing numbers of such single parents in Bristol and continue to be worried about the lack of support that this group is offered and the potential negative impact on their children.

5. Findings from Bristol: Experience at Jobcentre Plus

5.1 None of the single parents had been told explicitly about the legal flexibilities open to single parents who were job seekers although all knew that they could restrict their hours (but were unclear how they knew about this flexibility).

There were examples from each of the interviews that Jobcentre Plus had on occasions not taken account of their needs as a single parent:

- One thought that she was “not treated as a single parent but as a single person”. She has five children including three children at school aged 11, 15 and 16. In her job seekers agreement she needs to be prepared to travel one and a half hours each way for a job;

¹⁴ October 2011 update <http://equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/inquiries-and-assessments/assessment-of-compliance-into-JobCentre-plus/>

- One single parent was asked to apply for work in the evenings and has sole care of her son aged 13;
- Another single parent was told when she raised concern about the care of her 15-year-old son during the summer holiday that she would just “have to muddle through and find holiday care”;
- One of the parents, who has four children, the youngest of whom is 1 and the rest are at primary school, requested that the Job Centre change an early morning signing on appointment (it was set for 9am which was the same time as her children must arrive at school): “I rang and asked if I could change it as I have the girls to take to school, and if I went there first I would miss my appointment. They told me that if I did not make my appointment I would lose my benefits.” In addition her job seekers agreement states that she should work between 9:30am and 4:30pm Monday to Friday: “Those are the hours they put me for work. They did not think about my daughters”; and
- The single parent with the youngest children of one and three does not think that the Job Centre takes account of the difficulties of bringing small children to long appointments. “I don’t have anybody to leave my boys with ...they cannot sit quietly through an hour and a half if you have to wait without moving. There was a woman there who would ‘shhh’ them and say to me ‘If you can’t keep them quiet you must go out’. I do not want them to be noisy but what can I do? If one is quiet the other is crying, when he is quiet the other... [but she said] ‘There are people working here and you must let them work’.”

In contrast to the above experiences, those that had had contact with a Lone Parent Adviser whilst at the Job Centre felt this had been a positive experience and found the support helpful.

5.2 Five main findings from the interviews about the Work Programme

1) Lack of information about the public sector equality duty

None of the single parents interviewed were aware of the public sector equality duty including the duty to consider the need to advance equality of opportunity between men and women and had never seen reference to this at either the Job Centre or the Work Programme. They had no idea how they would access more information about it.

2) Lack of information about the transfer to the Work Programme

Most of the single parents found the transfer to the Work Programme stressful due to uncertainty and lack of information. Jobcentre Plus did not give them information about what the Work Programme would involve nor the practical arrangements such as how often they would need to attend or whether childcare would be provided. They relied on generic information in a letter from the Work Programme Provider to attend their appointments. There was no specific information about any variations in provision to take account of their circumstances. Most only knew about their transfer onto the Work Programme by letter.

One single parent's recollection of the letter she received about the transfer concentrated on the sanctions that she might receive if she did not attend signings or appointments and did not include practical details such as whether childcare would be provided it simply said "You have to attend and you have to keep signing on" and if she didn't attend it warned "We can stop your payment, we can stop your application for JSA' ... things like that".

3) Lack of clarity about childcare assistance

The single parents were concerned about childcare, for the parents with older children there was worry about what would happen to their children in the long summer holiday (the Work Programme's introduction coincided with this). The parents with younger children had more issues with the transfer onto the Work Programme because little account was taken of the needs of their children. Providers gave confusing and contradictory instructions as to what provision could be made for their children. These two parents were both turned away from their first meeting at the Work Programme because the providers were also catering for ex-offenders who cannot be in contact with children as a condition of their parole.

One explained: "I went with my son and they said that it wasn't safe...I went and explained that I couldn't leave my son in a nursery as it easily costs between £20 and £30 and I was on Job Seekers I could not afford it." This single parent was not allowed to go through with the appointment at the Work Programme but was told that they would see how they could help and wrote down that she had attended. She then had a letter stating that she had missed her appointment and if she missed the next one they would stop her benefits.

Another single parent that was turned away has also been given no information about help with childcare.

When one of the single parents with an older child asked about childcare provision the Jobcentre Plus adviser did not know whether the parent would get help with childcare or whether this would be paid for by the Work Programme.

4) Generic support

Single parents with older children thought that the adequacy of tailored support depended on the adviser that you were given on the Work Programme. They felt that most of the advisers gave generic support that was not tailored to their needs with mostly general information about job seeking. For example, one felt that all the people who attended her early Work Programme meetings were treated in the same way and "it was a complete waste of time." Her second interview was a one to one with an adviser and she said it felt very much like a JobCentre interview. Another said she did not think her circumstances as a single parent were taken into account and that she was treated like any job seeker.

However, there were some good experiences. For example, one single parent said she was content with the support she was getting and her Work Programme adviser had been particularly good at helping her to narrow down her job search and allowed her to look for local part-time work. Another stated that one of her advisers "was helpful and friendly with advice about CV writing and useful website links". Another said that one of her

advisers had been accommodating in moving an appointment to fit in with getting back home to look after her son.

5) Lack of clarity about training

Single parents of the older children wanted to undertake further training as they had been out of the job market for some time. They were told that there was no budget for training.

One of these parents was told that there was no money for training in the Work Programme. Another that there was "...no budget for training and that they will be helping you to find work with the skills you already have."

6. Evidence from single parents nationally

6.1 Further evidence was gathered on the experience of single parents transferring onto the Work Programme nationally. Single parents were not interviewed but their thoughts and experiences have been drawn together from SPAN's One Space interactive website. SPAN's online forum allows single parents to identify a subject for discussion and to provide ideas and support to one another. The Work Programme was first identified as an issue by a single parent in May 2011. It has been an active discussion topic amongst members since this time, as more members were transferred onto the Work Programme or were told they would transfer in the near future. Eleven single parents had been in discussion on One Space about the Work Programme since this time up until November 2011, with a total of 189 posts on this subject. All the discussions that had taken place during this period were drawn together and this information was then examined to see whether there were any issues in common amongst the different discussions from the parents. This showed five key themes within the discussions. These themes show some similarities with our findings from the Bristol interviews.

6.2 Five key themes from SPAN's One Space online forum discussions

1. Lack of information about the Work Programme

Many single parents were left in limbo from June 2011 waiting for the Work Programme to start with little information about what it would involve. This caused a lot of anxiety especially as this time coincided with the beginning of the school summer holidays. Many single parents felt that the Job Centre was not giving them sufficient information before they transferred over to the Work Programme or gave them inaccurate information. This caused some unnecessary stress to the parents and an extended time worrying about what the Work Programme would involve and what account would be taken of their children's needs.

One single parent summed up the situation as follows: "The job centres are the first contact jobseekers have when being passed to the Work Programme and of course will be expected to have answers to people's questions. Every member of staff I've met at my local Job Centre has no idea what the Work Programme providers are doing... My initial appointment is tomorrow from 3.30pm and I've been told to allow at least two hours. The Job Centre had assured me that the initial appointment would be less than an hour...so far anything to do with the Work Programme has been outside school hours. "

Another wrote: "I have recently been told that I am going on the Work Programme. The thought terrifies me because I have not been told any information about it other than it is mandatory and I will be expected to do some work experience...My youngest child has an underlying medical condition which means a lot of visits to the hospital. I am so worried about how I am going to combine his hospital visits with the Work Programme."

2. Lack of childcare and lack of clarity as to whether it would be paid for by the Work Programme

Single parents found it difficult to find information about whether childcare would be provided and paid for under the Work Programme. Neither Jobcentre Plus nor the Directgov website gave this information. Some Work Programme providers also gave mixed messages about childcare when people phoned up to make their appointment to attend. Again this gave an added stress to the single parents some of whom were transferring onto the Work Programme during the school summer holiday.

"My son is 12 and what will happen to him over the school holidays is definitely no laughing matter. I have applied for 8 part-time retail positions this week alone...there is so little information about these placements (*on the Work Programme*) and whether they will take into account the jobseekers requirements."

One single parent was told she would have to negotiate childcare arrangements with the Work Programme provider when she was transferred onto the Programme in June. However, she had to wait months before she got to meet and discuss this with the Programme provider, after a series of appointments were cancelled by them. She waited the whole summer to be told that she would not need to transfer onto the Work Programme until September when her child would be back at school.

There was particular confusion about what arrangements single parents should make for their children when attending their initial appointments. Like with the Bristol examples one single parent was told to bring her children to the Work Programme appointments and then told by someone else that she must not do so.

"I have been told I have to take my 11 year old twins to the Work Programme Induction (3 hours long), it's the summer holidays and I have no money for childcare."

This parent managed to get a friend to step in to look after her children but when she arrived at the Work Programme she was told that if she had arrived with her children she would have been turned away: "I can't have children in here, who told you to bring them?" well that is [what] the Work Programme person told me that rung me up to make an appointment."

3. Poor organisation of appointments

Like all claimants single parents must attend Jobcentre Plus to sign on for benefits and to attend agreed appointments with the Work Programme providers. They can be sanctioned for not attending. However, many of the initial appointments set up by the providers were moved or cancelled by them.

This is the experience of one single parent: “I am not alone in having turned up for set appointments, only to find out my adviser has been suddenly sent on a training course and no one has taken the trouble to tell me not to come in...because there was insufficient space in the temporary Work Programme Office, the advisers had to resort to telephone appointments...The random nature of appointments has been very confusing and it has been impossible to make any real plans what with all the fruitless to-ing and fro-ing...booking, unnotified cancellations and subsequent rebooking.”

When making appointments the providers had little information about the single parents, with one not even knowing that the claimant had a child: “I had a call from the provider I had been allocated to this evening (Friday). I explained it was inconvenient as I was having dinner with my child [aged 6] at the time...they apologised and said that according to their information there was no mention of a child on their records.”

It was also unclear whether single parents could ask for appointments that would fit in with their and their children’s lives (say during school hours).

4. Lack of training opportunities

As stated earlier single parents have only relatively recently (those with older children since 2008 those with younger since 2010) had an obligation to look for work as a condition of claiming an out of work benefit. Single parents are more likely to have been away from the job market for longer periods than the average job seeker. Many feel that they need to refresh their skills or retrain in order to get sustainable work. Before the change in benefit conditions single parents were more likely to use the time when their children were young to improve their training and education. Many single parents are disappointed by the lack of training opportunities offered by the Work Programme.

“I asked if there was any help from them with me wanting to retrain and study for a degree and was told ‘no’ (as I suspected). They only help with getting people into work, and would only give ‘job specific training’ for a specific job.”

In addition, some single parents thought that the courses that were on offer were too basic:

“One friend arrived for a specially booked one-to-one CV session but the person was unavailable and my friend was put on the same ‘how to write a CV’ course she had done many, many times before.”

5. Lack of suitable jobs for which to apply

Many single parents want to work part-time so that they also have time to care for their children. Single parents of younger children, aged 13 and under, can by law restrict their hours to school hours.

“I am more than willing to work, but those hours must fit in with caring for my children. Single parents need to be the judge of whether the job is suitable in their circumstances. The job needs to be local and term time. The employer needs to be understanding. But those jobs do not exist. I despair. Bringing up children on our own is already a job in itself.”

“As a single parent, the hours available to work are definitely limited. Last week I found a job that did not require telephone answering (*this single parent has a hearing disability*). Unfortunately it was outside office hours and only available as overnight shifts. I actually found myself weighing up the logistics of leaving my son alone in the house overnight.”

By the nature of advertised jobs there will be fewer jobs open to single parents than there are to people who can work full-time. However, single parents are still asked to apply for a high volume of jobs like all job seekers.

One adviser told a single parent with three children when she transferred onto the Work Programme that she needed to apply for 42 jobs a month; this was negotiated down to 24 jobs. But she highlights the lack of suitable advertised jobs: “I am on the Directgov website and there is one cleaning job in school hours, Monday to Friday, the rest are shift work and weekends.”

6.3 Some positives about the Work Programme

An advantage of the evidence from the One Space forum is seeing how single parents fared on the Work Programme over a number of months. What was disappointing was the lack of information given to single parents and the fear that many had over the transfer. Single parents did not know what account would be taken of their needs or their children. They did not know what the Work Programme would involve and what would be expected of them in terms of when they would attend and their time commitments. Whilst this would be frustrating to any job seeker the evidence from the One Space forum shows the added anxiety for single parents caused by this lack of information and a real worry over the school summer holiday.

For some single parents once on the Work Programme, the experience was more positive than they had anticipated with some good examples of their needs being taken into account.

For example, one single parent explained: “I attend an appointment once every two weeks and as long as you show you are looking for work they help not hassle. I have a great adviser she is lovely and encouraging”. She was also reassured by this adviser that she would not have to look for full-time work.

Another reported the following: “I pointed out that all the sessions had clashed with the school run and asked if allowances would be made for single parents who had childcare responsibilities. Was pleased by the answer, there are sessions at different times of the day so, if the single parent explains the situation they would be assigned to a more suitable time.”

However with the patchwork of Work Programme providers there is a problem with consistency. Many of the single parents who had transferred were still concerned about how they would be treated over the two-year period of the Programme and how the needs of their family would be taken into account over time.

7. Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 What is shown in our analysis is that there is no knowledge amongst single parents about the public sector equality duty and yet the application of the duty could make a real

difference to the way services are designed to address their needs. The previous equality schemes were not very accessible to members of the public. The DWP scheme was 300 pages long and the Jobcentre Plus' scheme 40 pages long. The new public sector equality duty means that public bodies will not have to produce separate equality schemes but could incorporate their equality information and objectives within their business documents. This will mean the public may find it even more difficult to find out how public authorities are meeting the equality duty than they currently do.

7.2 It is promising that there is some good practice within the Work Programme in relation to meeting the needs of single parents. It is important that good practice is spread to all providers. As a result of our findings in Bristol in regard to the two parents turned away from the Work Programme, we have been able to negotiate a change of policy and practice for the future with the local Work Programme provider. Single parents will no longer be turned away if they arrive with their children and at the first meeting the provider will establish childcare needs and payment for this where it is needed. But it is unclear with the patchwork of providers across the country how similar practice across providers can be changed. The 'black box' contracts also make it difficult for single parents to know what they can expect and what will be expected from them on the Work Programme. If the Work Programme is to address the needs of single parents and their children, as is required by the public sector equality duty, then their needs to be more consistent practice across providers. The monitoring and evaluation of the Work Programme needs to prioritise this. If not there is a danger that the Work Programme will not work for single parents and their disadvantage and inequality will be even more acute.

We have the following recommendations to improve compliance with the equality duty:

- Jobcentre Plus should have a specific gender equality objective relating to single parent job seekers among the equality objectives that it is required to develop and publish by 6 April 2012. It should also make clear how this objective has been translated into the contracts of the Work Programme providers;
- Jobcentre Plus should reconsider their plans to scrap Lone Parent Advisers. Feedback from this analysis shows the value of Lone Parent Advisers in understanding the needs of single parents in their journey back to work;
- There needs to be greater public awareness of the public sector equality duty and how DWP, Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers are meeting its requirements. The latest guidance for public sector bodies from the EHRC states, "Public bodies must ensure that the information they publish and the equality objectives they set are accessible to the public, free of charge."
- The Equality and Human Rights Commission should make assessing DWP, Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme providers' compliance with the equality duty a priority, given the concerns raised by us about how single parents' needs are not being properly met under the Work Programme and the removal of Lone Parent Advisers whose presence the EHRC had previously concluded demonstrated compliance with the gender equality duty;
- The Work Programme providers do not have specialist single parent advisers but can call on the services of second tier expertise. Any monitoring of the effectiveness of the Work Programme should explore how the services of the specialist subcontractors have been utilised;

- The DWP needs to find ways of promoting and sharing good equality practice amongst Work Programme providers so they can learn what helps single parents most effectively;
- Single parents are identified by the DWP as a group suffering substantial employment inequalities. The DWP should have effective monitoring in place to ensure that the Work Programme is meeting the needs of single parents;
- Greater emphasis should be placed on helping employers design jobs with part-time hours and encouraging employers to advertise more jobs with part-time and other flexible patterns of employment; and
- Equality objectives must change practice on the ground both at Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme, including making sure appointments for single parents fit around their children's needs such as arranging them during school hours.

This analysis highlights the experiences of single parents as they move onto the Work Programme for job seeking support. Single parents are diverse but for all of them as well as being a job seeker they have the responsibility of caring for their children. The public sector equality duty is a positive duty. Its purpose is to ensure public services are designed and delivered in a way that meets the diverse needs of actual and potential service users and does not disadvantage any particular groups.¹⁵ However, this analysis suggests that job-seeking services are not routinely designed with the needs of single parents in mind and they are therefore failing in their delivery.

¹⁵ The original race equality duty was introduced as a response to the Macpherson inquiry findings following the murder of Stephen Lawrence that the police and criminal justice system had collectively failed to provide an appropriate and professional service to one section of the community. It said it was “incumbent upon every institution to... guard against disadvantaging any section of our communities”.

Appendix A Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Duties

Guidance from the EHRC

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single Act.

The public sector **Equality Duty** (section 149 of the Act) came into force on 5 April 2011. The Equality Duty applies to public bodies and others carrying out public functions. It supports good decision-making by ensuring public bodies consider how different people will be affected by their activities, helping them to deliver policies and services which are efficient and effective; accessible to all; and which meet different people's needs.

The Equality Duty is supported by **specific duties**, set out in regulations which came into force on 10 September 2011. The specific duties require public bodies to publish relevant, proportionate information demonstrating their compliance with the Equality Duty.

The specific duties require public bodies to:

- publish information to show their compliance with the Equality Duty, at least annually; and
- set and publish equality objectives, at least every four years.

All information must be published in a way which makes it easy for people to access it.

Public bodies subject to the specific duties must publish information to show their compliance with the Equality Duty. This means that the information they publish must show that they had due regard to the need to:

- **eliminate unlawful discrimination**, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- **advance equality of opportunity** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- **foster good relations** between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

We describe these as the three aims of the Equality Duty.

The protected characteristics covered by the Equality Duty are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership (but only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination)
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Public bodies must publish information to show that they consciously thought about the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making.

Public bodies must publish their first equality objectives by 6 April 2012. Subsequent objectives must be published at least every four years.

It is for each public body to decide what equality objectives it should set and how many there should be. Objectives which are stretching, and focus on the biggest equality challenges facing the public body, will have the greatest impact in furthering the aims of the Equality Duty.

In setting its objectives, a public body may find it helpful to think about (for e.g.):

- what types of equality issues are raised by its staff and customers;
- where the evidence indicates that equality performance is poor;
- the people and organisations it would be useful to talk to in the process of setting objectives.

Appendix B

Jobcentre Plus Delivery Plan 2011-12

The plan states “In delivering out services we promote equality and fairness. We aim to eliminate discrimination, supporting departmental objectives by making our services accessible to everyone.”

Promoting equality and fairness, eliminating discrimination and delivering accessible services

We work hard to understand the diverse needs of our customers and staff so that we can make our services accessible and appropriate for all.

In July 2009 the Equality and Human Rights Commission published a report into our compliance with race, disability and gender equality legislation. The report gave us a practical framework for deepening our compliance. We have put new processes and guidance in place in response to this report and in 2011-12 will further develop these, taking account of the 2010 Equality Act, by:

- engaging with organisations representing customer interests (including the protected groups defined in the 2010 Act);

- reviewing and addressing the support needs of our people to ensure we deliver compliance with the new Public Sector Duty and wider Act;

- using our Diversity Challenge to promote equality and fairness and review our performance across the business;

- Working wider with the Department for Work and Pensions to comply with the data publishing requirement in the 2010 Act; and

- Supporting delivery of equality impact assessments through our strengthened processes and a new system of support for managers.

Appendix C The Merlin Standard

The development of the Merlin Standard has been progressed as a joint exercise between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and its providers operating in the Welfare to Work (W2W) sector.

DWP supports the Merlin Standard as a positive means by which it can provide stewardship of the W2W marketplace via a co-regulation approach with present and future providers operating in the sector.

The Merlin Principles

The Merlin Standard has been designed to recognise and promote sustainable excellence and positive partnership working within supply chains and provide guidance to those seeking to achieve it. It is built upon four fundamental and integrated principles; **Supply Chain Design, Commitment, Conduct** and **Review**. These Principles have been designed to examine key areas of the relationship between a Prime Contractor (hereafter referred to as 'Primes') and its Supply Chain Partners. Criteria underpinning the principles also seek to review the role of **Commissioning**, including the procurement process, and how supply chain behaviour is affected by the behaviour of the Commissioner. The Principles are established to validate positive behaviour of Primes and supply chain partners in line with the Code of Conduct, a key facet of the Commissioning Strategy in creating healthy and high performing supply chains.

Promoting Equality and Diversity

The Prime Contractor can demonstrate:

- that in agreeing supply chain partnership arrangements it has ensured that processes are in place and in alignment with their own commitment to equality and diversity
- that effective processes are in place to monitor and promote Equality and Diversity throughout the supply chain
- how the skills and expertise of the supply chain meet the demographics of the customer groups served
- the way in which Equal Opportunities data is collected, analysed and used within the supply chain.

Supply chain partners

- can evidence how at an early stage they have discussed equality and diversity with the Prime both in terms of customer service and in respect to policies and procedures for their people
- can demonstrate how diversity is promoted through policies and working practices throughout the supply chain
- can describe how they monitor and share information with the Prime to support collection, analysis and use of relevant data regarding equality and diversity.
- provides a grievance route for providers who believe that the Code of Conduct is not being adhered to, via the Mediation and Arbitration service.

Appendix D

Questions for Bristol Single Parents

1. How long have you been on benefits?
2. Which benefits have you been on?
3. How many children do you have and what are their ages?
4. Have you ever seen or had support from a Lone Parent Adviser at Jobcentre Plus?
5. How was your experience with the specialist adviser?
6. There are certain flexibilities that are open to single parents who are looking for work. For instance if you have a child under 13 you can restrict your hours of work to school hours. Have you been told about these flexibilities and if so which ones are you aware of?
7. When were you notified that you would move to the Work Programme?
8. Who is your Work Programme provider?
9. What information have you been given about the services that have been offered by the provider?
10. At your meeting with the provider did you think that they took account of your needs and those of your family? If so what was positive/negative?
11. For instance were you told whether childcare would be available when you attended meetings or training?
12. Has your Work Programme provider taken account of the flexibilities that are open to you as a single parent on JSA? If so could you say what these have included? If not what could they have done to address your needs?
13. Do you know what a public sector equality duty is?
14. Did you know that Jobcentre Plus has a duty to provide equality of opportunity between men and women including tailoring services and policies to your needs (for instance as a parent)?
15. Have you ever been told about this duty or shown/know where you could find a copy of a document setting this out?