

Consultation Response JSA Statistics – Single Parent Action Network

This is a response on behalf of the Single Parent Action Network (SPAN registered charity 1092929). We have a membership across the country of over two thousand including single parent projects and individual single parents. We have a Bristol based Family and Study centre where we provide courses including help for people wanting to return to work. We have a national web service for single parents ‘One Space’ with around 30,000 unique visitors each month. Last year we published research about single parents transferring onto job seeking benefits in consultation with the University of the West of England¹. We have also published an analysis of single parents experience of the Work Programme². We have followed this up nationally with a more comprehensive study looking at the experience of single parents nationally³.

There has been a ten-fold rise in the number of single parents with job seeking responsibilities since 2008 (400,000). As well as being as being a job seeker single parents also have responsibility for the care and well being of their children. In recognition of this responsibility there are ‘lone parent flexibilities’ which can make single parents job preparation and job search different from other job seekers (such as an ability to look for work during school hours when a child is under 13). In addition Jobcentre Plus (JCP) must comply with the public sector equality duty to tailor their services to the needs of single parents and their children (as must the contracted services under the Work Programme). The protection of the well being of children is also contained in the welfare legislation in relation to Jobseekers Agreements⁴ (and this provision is included in the Welfare Reform Act 2012 Claimant Commitment).

Our research and other interaction with single parents give us a good understanding of the lived experiences of single parents on Jobseekers Allowance including the sanctions regime. We are concerned by the rapid increase in the sanctions imposed on single parents and we think that there needs to be more transparent data about the reasons for these to make sure that they are being applied appropriately.

Number of JSA lone parent claimants who have had a sanction applied January

¹ *A longitudinal qualitative study of the journey of single parents on jobseekers allowance.* SPAN & University of the West of England May 2012

http://issuu.com/spanbristol/docs/span__jsa_report_web

² *Is the Work Programme Working for Single Parents? An Analysis of the Experience of Single Parents moving onto the Work Programme.* March 2012 SPAN.

<http://spanuk.org.uk/publications/>

³ Work and Pensions Select Committee Inquiry Work Programme: the experience of different user groups. Submission of written evidence from SPAN Dec 2012.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmworpen/writev/work/m15.htm>

⁴ Section 31 Welfare Reform Act 2009.

2008 - April 2012⁵

Number of JSA lone parent claimants

January 2008 - December 2008	1,340
January 2009 - December 2009	4,970
January 2010 - December 2010	14,070
January 2011 - December 2011	20,580
January 2012 - April 2012	8,940

Single parents have protections within legislation that allows their job preparation and job search to be different from other job seekers to take account of their responsibilities to care for their child. We would like statistics kept of single parents who are threatened or have sanctions imposed both from JCP and the WP (we know that a Decision Maker at JCP makes the final decision) including the reasons for the sanctions. Any threats or imposed sanctions on single parents must take account of the protections in the welfare and equality legislation. Keeping statistics about the reason behind a threat of a sanction would go some way to demonstrate that this group of claimants were being treated fairly. It needs to be transparent that they are not threatened or getting a sanction because of a legitimate reason around their caring responsibilities.

Currently there are no statistics or information available about why single parents are sanctioned⁶. From our research single parents were worried about the threat of sanctions⁷. The DWP's own research identified that some single parents were receiving sanctions that could relate to their caring responsibilities⁸. For instance a single parent being sanctioned when her child was ill and was not able to attend an appointment. Another parent was sanctioned for not applying for 6 jobs each week (single parents restriction on hours means there are likely to be many less jobs available for him/her to apply to). From our on line forum One Space we have similar examples including a single father who was sanctioned for missing an appointment when he was picking up his child from school.

Claimants, who are longer term unemployed, including single parents, are transferred to the WP. Single parents are a significant user group on the Work Programme making up 7.4% (63,333) of all attachments between June 2011- July 2012. Currently there are no

⁵ *Parliamentary Question HC Deb, 24 October 2012, c955W. Source: JSA Sanctions and Disallowance Decisions Statistics Database; JSA Lone Parent Spells database*

⁶ *Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston, Labour) Parliamentary Question Citation: HC Deb, 24 October 2012, c956W*

⁷ *A longitudinal qualitative study of the journey of single parents on jobseekers allowance. SPAN & University of the West of England May 2012 (p100).*

⁸ *Lone Parent Obligations: work, childcare and the Jobseeker's Allowance regime May 2012*

statistics kept about the reasons why single parents are being sanctioned on the Work Programme⁹. It is therefore difficult to know whether they are being sanctioned inappropriately for instance when they are asked to attend an appointment or carry out an activity when legitimately they should not have to do so.

From our interaction with single parents on the Work Programme they have raised concerns about the threat of sanctions and that they can be applied inconsistently between Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme. This can leave single parents confused as to what instructions they must carry out under the Work Programme. This is further complicated by the different policies that Work Programme offices have towards children on their premises, with some turning away single parents when they arrive with their children (something that does not happen at JCP) which makes it harder for single attendance on the WP especially during the school holidays.

Two single parents in our recent study were told by the WP to apply for jobs that went against their Jobseekers Agreement¹⁰ (which had been agreed at JCP). For instance one was told to apply for jobs where she would have to work Saturday and Sunday even though her agreement specified work between Monday and Friday. Another single parent was told by JCP that she did not need to attend and sign on during the school summer holiday and yet the WP insisted that she attend over the summer holiday (although they would not provide childcare). She refused to attend and a sanction was threatened (although the Decision Maker overturned). The parent spent the long summer holiday worried about the sanction and what it would mean for her child. This last example also shows the importance of keeping figures on the time claimants wait between a sanction being threatened and the Decision Makers final decision.

The long wait for a final decision about a sanction is a concern for single parents. The overall statistics for WP claimants show 195 thousand referrals for JSA sanctions were made and completed by the end of April 12 where claimants failed to participate in the Work Programme. Of these, 73 thousand resulted in an adverse decision; 60 thousand received a favourable decision and 63 thousand were cancelled or reserved to be reviewed/ applied on a future benefit claim." ¹¹ The Decision Makers at JCP therefore overwhelmingly overturn the initial decision of the WP provider with only 38% leading to a sanction standing. As the majority of threatened sanctions do not stand it is important that figures are kept on the time taken to make these decisions. Single parents reported that the school holidays and attendance on the WP was a time that they were particularly vulnerable to being threatened with sanctions. It is important that decisions about sanctions are made quickly so that these parents are not experiencing undue anxiety at a time when their child needs their particular care. In addition it would be helpful to

⁹ Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) Parliamentary Question Citation: HC Deb 21 May 2012 c495w <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2012-05-21b.108230.h#g108230.q0>

¹⁰ Work and Pensions Select Committee Inquiry Work Programme: the experience of different user groups. Submission of written evidence from SPAN Dec 2012 (P4)

¹¹ DWP Quarterly Statistical Summary

have a record kept of the decision makers rejected sanctions so that WP providers are discouraged from applying similar sanctions in the future. These decisions should be shared with providers (and made public) so that inappropriate sanctions can be avoided in the future.

Laura Dewar
Senior Policy & Parliamentary Officer
Single Parent Action Network.
M: 07947675925
Email:L.dewar@spanuk.org.uk

4 4
4
4

4
4
4 4
4
4
4
4 4