

Left behind

Single parents with pre-school
aged children and job-seeking
under Universal Credit in London



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About Gingerbread

Gingerbread is the leading national charity working with single parent families. Our mission is to champion and enable single parent families to live secure, happy and fulfilling lives. Since 1918, we've been supporting, advising and campaigning with single parents to help them meet the needs of their families and achieve their goals. We want to create a world in which diverse families can thrive. We won't stop working until we achieve this vision. Whatever success means for a single parent – a healthy family, a flexible job, stable finances or a chance to study – we work with them to make it happen.

Acknowledgments

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**We want
to create
a world
in which
diverse
families
can thrive.**

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Summary

Background

The roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) is gathering momentum with the Covid-19 crisis, with nearly 60% of single parents now having transferred onto this benefit.

One aspect of UC which has received less attention to date is the obligation for parents of pre-school aged children¹ to look for work once their youngest child reaches three years of age. Once UC is fully rolled out, it is estimated that this policy will impact 25,000 single parents in London (Dewar and Ben-Galim, 2017). Our research, which involved quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews, sought to explore the potential impact of this policy change on single parents in the capital, in order to make recommendations regarding its future implementation and delivery.



Which single parents will be affected by this policy?

- Single parents of pre-school aged children in the capital are a relatively distinct group. Just 50% are in employment, markedly lower than the rate for single parents with pre-school aged children in the UK as a whole (58%). The gap between the employment rates of single and couple parents of pre-school aged children is considerably larger in London than elsewhere.
- These single parents are markedly less well-qualified than both couple parents and other single parents in the UK. 42% of single parents with pre-school aged children in London have no qualification or a qualification below Level 2; the equivalent proportion for the UK is 28% while, for couple parents, it is 13% in both instances. Single parents of pre-school aged children in London are more likely to be younger than couple parents; 57% of these single parents in London are aged under 35 years, compared with 30% of couple parents.
- This lower employment rate, and higher prevalence of factors known to be associated with difficulties in acquiring and progressing at work, may make the implementation of the job-seeking requirements for this group of single parents more difficult to achieve.

¹ While the policy applies to parents whose youngest child is three or four, we have referred to this population as "parents of pre-school aged children" throughout.

Experiences of and attitudes to new job-seeking requirements

Single parents expressed mixed views as to the desirability of work requirements for those with pre-school aged children. Opposition to the policy is underpinned by a range of views – that the specified age at which this requirement is introduced is too young, that the requirement is too generic and does not take account of the different situations facing single parents (particularly in terms of informal help with childcare), and their own experiences of trying to fulfil the requirement, which have led them to conclude it is unrealistic.

Experiences of seeking work

Single parents perceived the requirement to secure 16 hours of work per week as challenging for a number of inter-related reasons.

- **Finding suitable work:** single parents consistently expressed the view that the ‘golden middle of the day’ jobs, which satisfy the requirement to work 16 hours in a way that fitted in with childcare, travel and other commitments, were highly desirable and hard to come by.
- Having **limited technology** available also presented a challenge to those single parents who did not have a computer at home, who felt this made applying for jobs much more difficult.
- As well as constraining the roles they could apply for, single parents have found **the process of securing matched** childcare at the same time as applying for a job challenging. As well as a lack of availability, the costs could be problematic, exacerbated by the need to pay the first month of fees in advance and being paid childcare costs under UC in arrears. Overall, there was an acknowledgement that having informal childcare available made the process of securing work much easier.
- **Experiences of UC and Job Centre Plus (JCP) support** in relation to the new work requirement have been varied. Single parents report a lack of information and clarity when transferring to UC, with variable views expressed on how much they would receive, what information they would need to provide and the precise details of the job requirements they would need to meet. There is evidence of variation in the presence and involvement of named work coaches and in single parents’ understandings of the functions of the online journal. There is a widely-held view that JCP support does not take account of single parents’ individual circumstances; this was most strongly expressed by those who were self-employed.
- **The role of flexibilities:** while many single parents are interested in improving their job prospects by undertaking additional training and education (and we cite evidence of the current lower educational levels of this group of parents in the capital as a barrier to securing sustainable work) it is not always felt that the systems and staff in place at JCP are informing or supporting single parents to undertake training. There is a flexibility that these parents can train for up to a year and have their



job-seeking turned off but single parents are not being told about this. It is widely felt that JCPs could do more in this area, although the lack of funded childcare for single parents undertaking training is identified as a persistent barrier.

Impact of the Covid-19 crisis

When discussing the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, single parents told us about difficulties with working and caring without childcare, a drop in available work and income, concerns about future work prospects and more restricted access to support from work coaches.

The impact on single parents with pre-school aged children will be felt post-crisis as there is already a marked decline in advertised vacancies, an anticipated drop in the number of childcare places and an expected unprecedented rise in unemployment which will see a huge surge in UC claimants with pressure on work coaches. Taken together these trends mean that the job-seeking requirements for single parents will be even harder to achieve.

Recommendations for action

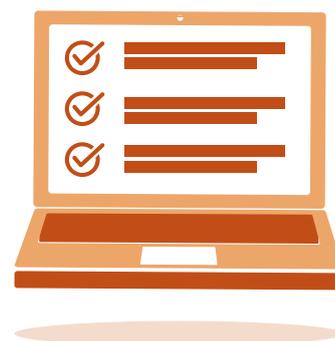
Gingerbread want the government to deliver on the personalised support that it promised for single parents on UC with pre-school aged children.

This is particularly important in London (where these parents tend to be younger, less qualified and less likely to be in work). Urgent action is needed for single parents with pre-school aged children in London to set them on a better path to improving their skills, having access to consistent support and affordable and accessible childcare. Setting single parents up for more sustainable work while their children are young will help with the prosperity of their families in the longer term.

Gingerbread is calling for recommendations for change from both national and local government in London.

National recommendations

- The DWP must provide clear written communication about the easements and flexibilities that are open to single parents with pre-school aged children including shorter commuting times, lower hours of work and opportunities to train. All single parents must be provided with this information in writing, prior to agreeing to a claimant commitment. All single parents with pre-school aged children must also have access to a named work coach.



- Claimant commitments should be agreed as part of a genuine two-way process, taking into account the circumstances of single parents and how they might be supported into work. In light of current inconsistencies in claimant commitments, we call for a second work coach to always review the content of claimant commitments for those with pre-school aged children.
- Jobcentres should provide specialist provision for single parents or work coaches should make referrals to specialist providers and career coaching. The Chancellor has pledged resources for extra career advisers. These should be targeted towards this group of single parents.
- Single parents with limited technology should be allowed priority access in libraries and jobcentres to computers. Clearer information must be made available as to the role of the online journal with support for those who find this technology challenging.
- The government should publicise that training and skills acquisition is open to single parents of pre-school aged children for up to a year. It should ensure that policies in relation to skills and childcare are joined-up. Specifically, the 30 hours policy should be open to those who are improving their skills and training.
- Jobcentres should provide better support for single parents who are self-employed or who are considering self-employment. The Minimum Income Floor should be suspended for an additional year to allow greater time for single parents to build up their businesses post Covid-19; subsequently, there needs to be less rigidity around the need to work (receive pay for) a minimum of 16 hours for this group of parents.
- The Department for Education (DfE) must urgently review the current operation of the 30 hour free childcare offer to make it more compatible with the realities of seeking a job and working. In addition, the mechanics of financial support for childcare under UC need to be reviewed. It is a clear barrier to single parents with the youngest children to move into and sustain a job when they have to pay their childcare costs in advance each month.
- The Departments for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Work and Pensions (DWP) must work together to open up opportunities for more part-time and flexible work including incentivising businesses to open up vacancies on a job-share basis through their 'find a job' website.

London recommendations

- The DWP should pilot a London-wide Childcare Deposit Scheme for pre-school aged childcare including deposits and the first month's advance payment for those parents on UC who are entering or increasing their hours of work. This should be universally available and paid for from a specific fund, rather than being drawn on a discretionary basis from the Flexible Support Fund as is currently the case. This could be based on the successful scheme devised by Gingerbread and developed by the Greater London Authority (GLA).

- Regional JCP Managers in London should better co-ordinate support for single parents with pre-school aged children from specialist providers and ensure that this support is publicised so that parents can more consistently benefit from these schemes. There should be a greater emphasis on single parents with pre-school aged children receiving advice and support within Family and Children's Centres.
- Regional JCP Managers in London should publicise the training flexibility that is open to these single parents to train for up to a year and must better co-ordinate training and support with local colleges and providers across the London Boroughs. The GLA, London Councils and regional JCP Partnership Managers should work together to improve the support offered to single parents with pre-school aged children post Covid-19. In particular, we call on the Recovery Board that is led by the GLA to support training and flexible jobs for these single parents, with the recognition that this group of parents have been hard hit by the Covid-19 crisis – and without additional support their economic inequality will grow. Local Councils should consider a register of employers in the London Boroughs who offer flexible and part-time work including school hours.

Introduction

The roll-out of UC is gathering momentum with the Covid-19 crisis with nearly 60% of single parents having transferred to the benefit.²

There are well-documented challenges to UC such as the five-week wait for the first payment, the payment of childcare costs in arrears and advanced payments being made as a loan.

However, other changes brought about by the introduction of UC have not received the same attention including the obligation for parents of pre-school aged children to look for work as a condition of receiving UC, once their youngest child reaches the age of three, introduced in April 2017. By the government's own estimate, this policy change will have a significant impact on single parents; it has estimated that a total of 220,000 responsible carers will be impacted by this policy change and that 75% of those with children in this age group will be single parents (DWP, 2015). In London, we estimate that between 15,000 and 16,000 single parents with pre-school aged children were already subject to the job-seeking requirement in 2019;³ it has previously been estimated that this policy change will ultimately affect 25,000 single parents in the capital (Dewar and Ben-Galim, 2017). Single parents continue to move over to UC through natural migration rules, as they make a new claim for the benefit or experience a change of circumstances. In view of the large increase in UC claims during the Covid-19 crisis, this transfer is likely to gather pace.

The increased conditionality for parents of pre-school aged children represents a significant change. It is the first time that parents of pre-school aged children have been required to job seek or risk being sanctioned, although the age cut off for requirements of this type has increasingly been lowered over recent years, as depicted in Figure 1.

Drawing on new quantitative and qualitative research,⁴ this report summarises what is known about increased work conditionality for single parents with pre-school aged children in London. Analysis of Labour Force Survey (LFS) data was undertaken to help us understand the size and characteristics of the population of single parents subject to this policy, as these factors are likely to have implications for its application and effectiveness. Qualitative data collection involving 16 single parents was undertaken to explore single parents' individual attitudes to and experiences of increased work conditionality. In addition, discussions were held with JCP Partnership

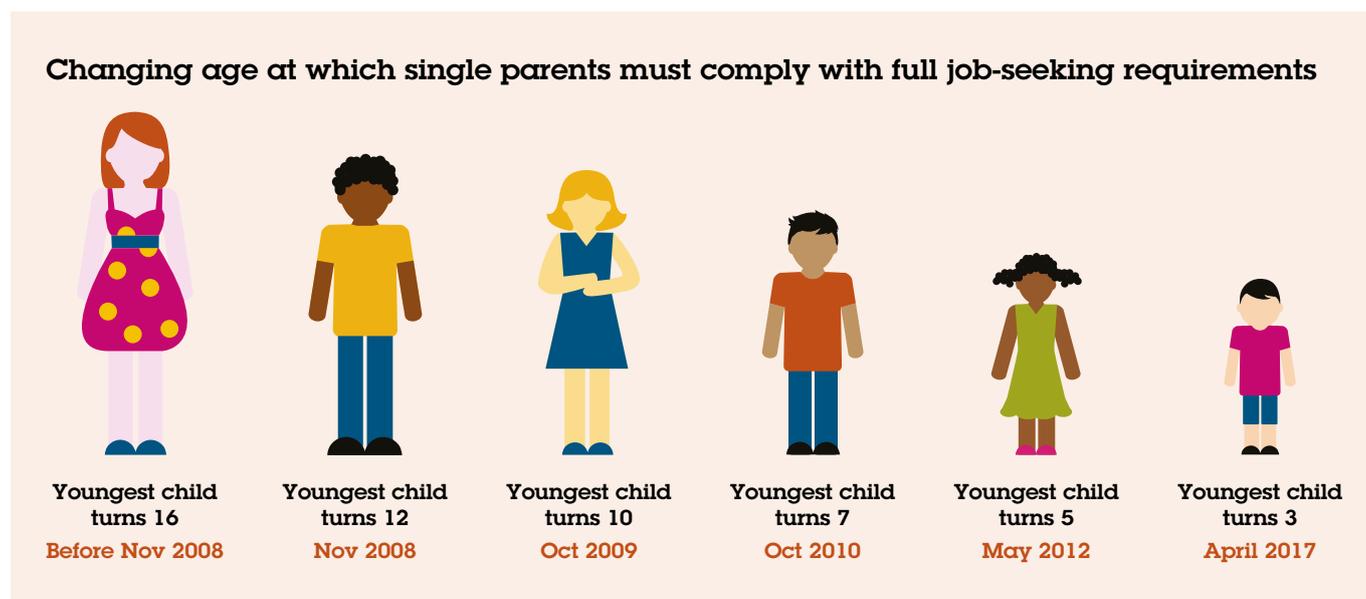
Drawing on new quantitative and qualitative research, this report summarises what is known about increased work conditionality for single parents with pre-school aged children in London

2 This proportion has been calculated using the number of single parent households in receipt of UC in May 2020 (available via the DWP's Stat-Xplore system <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/tableView/tableView.xhtml>) and data on the number of single parents in the UK, provided in ONS' Families and Households' data series, available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/datasets/familiesandhouseholds/familiesandhouseholds>

3 The Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates that there were 68,326 single parents with pre-school aged children in London in the fourth quarter of 2019. Across 2019, our analysis indicates that an average of 23% of this group were in receipt of UC. These figures have been used to estimate the number subject to the job-seeking requirement at the end of 2019.

4 Further details of the methodology used for this research are provided in the Appendix.

Figure 1 : Work requirements for single parents



Managers in North and South London and DWP's Employability Outreach Team, to identify the types of bespoke support currently offered to single parents.

Inevitably, much has changed as a result of the Covid-19 crisis that will have implications for the future implementation of this policy; these changes, and how they have impacted on single parents' lived experiences of work and job-seeking, are summarised in our final section. On the basis of our findings and the situation in the summer of 2020, we set out a series of recommendations for government, JCP Partnership Managers in London, the GLA and London Councils regarding the future implementation of this policy and what can be done to improve single parents' outcomes in relation to work and job-seeking support going forward.

Policy context

Justification for change

The government announced the requirement for parents of pre-school aged children to seek work in their 2015 Summer Budget and introduced the policy change through the Welfare and Work Act 2016, with the requirement being in place from April 2017.

The rationale for the policy is set out in their impact assessment (DWP 2015). The government were concerned about the low employment rate for parents with pre-school aged children and felt that parents should take financial responsibility for themselves and their children. Citing previous increases to work conditionality which had resulted in greater proportions of parents moving into work, they concluded that support for parents with pre-school aged children would enable more households in this group to move into work and, in the longer-term,

improve children’s well-being and life chances. It stated that,

“Employment among lone parents increased as conditionality was extended to those with children aged 5 and over, but it remains low for parents of younger children...Evidence finds that parents who have conditionality are more likely to move into work”

– *Ibid*

Specifically, it referenced a previous impact assessment which showed that,

“the change increased employment for carers of 9 year olds by around 10 percentage points more than would have happened otherwise 9 months after the intervention; a pattern that was also seen in further reducing the age of the youngest child”

– *Department for Work and Pensions, 2013*

It should be noted, however, that the impact assessment did not reference the specific challenges in job-seeking facing single parents with the youngest children.

Additional support and flexibilities

The impact assessment stated that the Government would invest in support for parents of three and four year olds, with an increase to free childcare hours of up to 30 hours for those who were working and an increase in childcare support to 85% under UC. There was reassurance that work coaches would tailor job-seeking for these parents, “to ensure that their individual claimant commitments are fully tailored.” After the passage of the welfare legislation Gingerbread worked with cross party peers in the House of Lords and the then Welfare Reform Minister Lord Freud on a series of flexibilities that reflected the needs of these parents to work and care and recognised the distinct characteristics of this group of parents. These flexibilities included shorter commuting times, fewer hours of work than for those with older children and the ability to train for up to a year and have job seeking turned off for this period.⁵

In summary, the increased work conditionality is a significant change for single parents of pre-school aged children. While it brings the UK more in line with many other countries (Haux, 2013,⁶) it should be noted that the specific requirements, employment rates for single parents, available childcare regimes and so on differ markedly in these countries, meaning we cannot simply apply learning from the implementation of these regimes to the UK context.

“After the passage of the welfare legislation Gingerbread worked with cross party peers in the House of Lords and the then Welfare Minister Lord Freud on a series of flexibilities that reflected the needs of these parents to work and care and recognised the distinct characteristics of this group of parents”

5 Expected hours should be set at a maximum of 16 hours for responsible carers of children aged 3 or 4. This can be tailored to take account of individual circumstances related to health or caring responsibilities. Travel to work time should be proportionate to the work search expectation with the following caps being applied: 0-16 hours weekly work search – travel time capped at 60 minutes. Up to 10 hours weekly work search – travel time capped at 30 minutes. These can be varied further to take account of individual circumstances. For responsible carers with a child aged 2-4 there should be greater acceptance and encouragement for them to participate in training that is longer than the normal short term training courses. Where the work coach is satisfied that the course/training will increase the claimants chance of securing work by the time their youngest child reaches school age, the work coach is able to switch off or adjust the claimants availability/work search until the training has been completed. This would be for a maximum period of up to one year.

6 Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the UK, Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Israel, Luxemburg and Switzerland all have an age of youngest child approach to work activation for single parents. This is usually set at around when the youngest child reaches three or four usually when children enter kindergarten or around five or six when their child starts school.

Quantitative analysis



Who are the single parents who will be affected by this policy?

We undertook quantitative analysis of LFS data to explore the size of the population of single parents who would be affected by this policy in the capital, their current employment rates and the characteristics that were likely to affect its application and effectiveness.

How many single parents?

The number of single parents in the capital who will be impacted by the new job-seeking requirement is inevitably constantly fluctuating. It is determined by the number of single parents whose youngest child is aged three or four and the proportion of this group who are in receipt of UC, which has increased gradually over time and will increase markedly as a consequence of the Covid-19 crisis.

In the final quarter of 2019, there were an estimated 68,326 single parents whose youngest child was aged three or four in London. Of this group, around 23% were in receipt of UC, a proportion similar to the rates seen in the UK as a whole and among all single parents in London (22%). Based on this proportion, we estimate that there were between 15,000 and 16,000 single parents who could potentially be impacted by this policy at the end of 2019 (as detailed in Footnote 2).

How many of these single parents are employed?

The employment rate for this group of single parents will obviously impact on the degree of change in labour market activity which the new job-seeking requirements will aim to engineer. They will also determine how far a 'bespoke' system of support might be needed for this group if, for example, their employment rates are markedly different from other parents, or other single parents. In this regard, our analysis of LFS data yielded several interesting findings: Focusing on parents whose youngest child was aged

three or four, we find that single parents with young children in London are less likely to be employed than single parents in the UK as a whole, while couple parents are more likely to be employed in London than in the UK as a whole. This suggests that single parent status may have a proportionately bigger impact on employment rates in London than in the UK as a whole, as shown in Figure 2. The difference between the employment rates of single and couple parents with pre-school aged children in the UK is 27 percentage points, compared with a 38 percentage point difference in London.

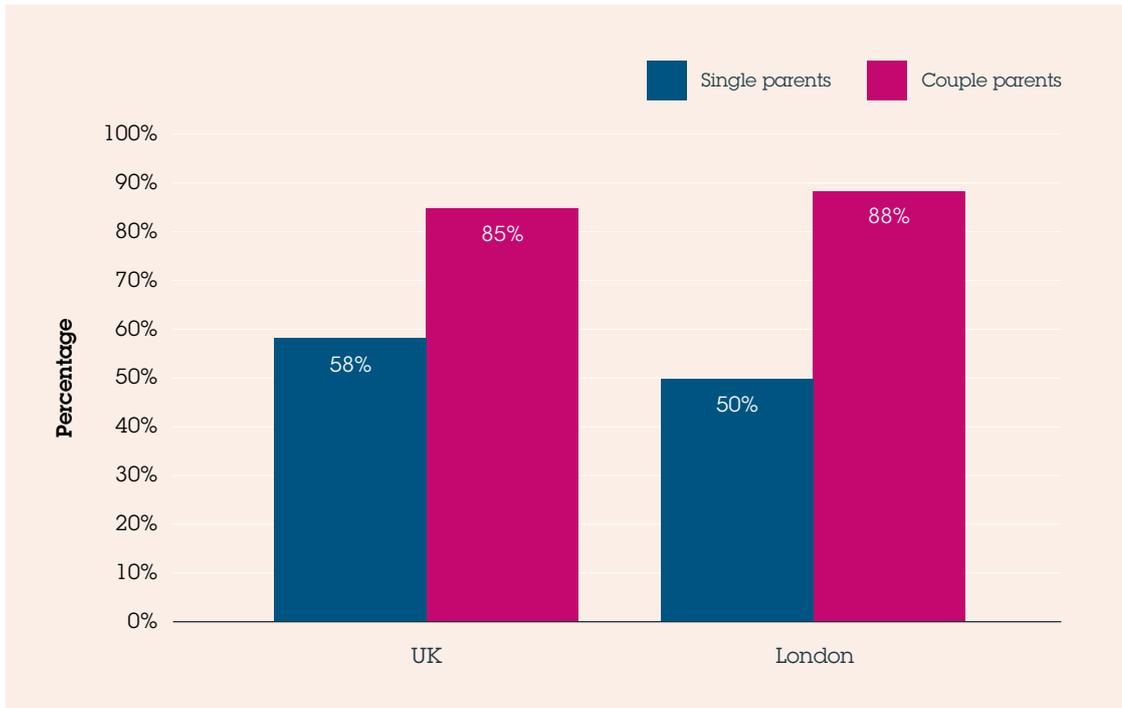


Figure 2: Employment rates of parents of three and four year olds by parental status, UK and London, 2019

Source: Labour Force Survey (four quarterly data sets for 2019 combined)

The analysis of employment rates relates to all single parents with pre-school aged children, not just those in receipt of UC. The fact that only a minority of single parents received UC in 2019 makes more detailed analysis for this group in the capital problematic. However, analysis for UC recipients with pre-school aged children is possible at the UK level. Here, we find that single parents whose youngest child is aged three or four, who are in receipt of UC, are not substantially less likely to be employed, compared with those not in receipt of this benefit. We therefore can be relatively confident that the employment rates discussed above are relevant to the sub-set of single parents in the capital who have moved to UC.

Single parents therefore appear to be more distinct from couple parents in their employment rates in the capital, than is the case nationwide, suggesting that the implementation of job-seeking requirements in London may be a greater challenge. In this regard, it is also worth considering how this group of single parents compares with the broader population of single parents as a whole, both in the UK and in London.

Table 1 illustrates that the employment rates of single parents whose youngest child is aged three or four are particularly distinct, compared with the population of single parents as a whole. In London, single parents with pre-school aged children are more markedly different from other single

parents than in the UK as a whole. The employment rate for single parents with pre-school aged children in London is 23 percentage points lower than for all single parents in London, compared with a 12 percentage point difference for single parents in the UK as a whole.

Table 1: Employment rates for single and couple parents in UK and London, by age of youngest child, 2019

	UK		LONDON	
	Youngest child 3–4 years old	All	Youngest child 3–4 years old	All
Single parents	58%	69%	50%	74%
Couple parents	85%	85%	88%	87%

Source: Labour Force Survey (four quarterly data sets for 2019 combined)

Taken together, these data suggest that there may be particular challenges faced by single parents with pre-school aged children in the capital that discourage employment, but which may not apply to the same degree to couple parents, or to single parents in the UK more widely. This pattern suggests that the implementation of job-seeking requirements for this group may be particularly challenging.

Single parents of pre-school aged children in London: a distinct group?

To unpick some of the potential reasons for the distinct employment rates of single parents of pre-school aged children in the capital, we examined two characteristics known to be associated with labour market outcomes – educational qualifications and age.

We found that single parents are considerably less qualified than couple parents, both in the UK as a whole and in London specifically – with the magnitude of difference being fairly similar in both instances.

Focusing on parents with pre-school aged children specifically, the same pattern is evident in both the UK and London. However, in London, it is even more marked. In the capital, 42% of single parents with pre-school aged children have either no qualification or a qualification below Level 2; the equivalent proportion for couple parents is 13%. The equivalent proportions for the UK as a whole are 28% for single parents and 13% for couple parents. In other words, in London, single parents with pre-school aged children are more markedly different to couple parents in their qualification levels (although they are not significantly different from single parents in the UK as a whole). This might go some way to explain the greater differences in single and couple parents’ employment rates in the capital.

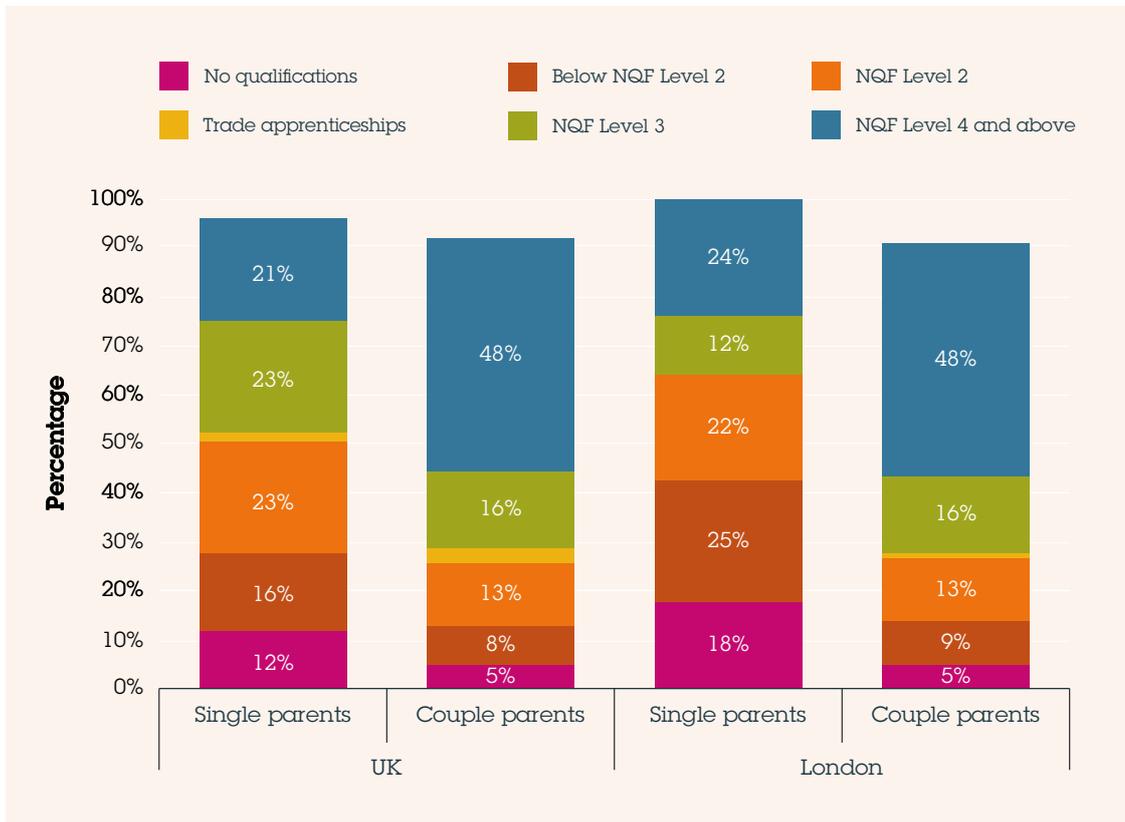


Figure 3:
Highest educational qualification by parental status for parents with pre-school aged children, UK and London, 2019⁷

Source: Labour Force Survey (four quarterly data sets for 2019 combined)

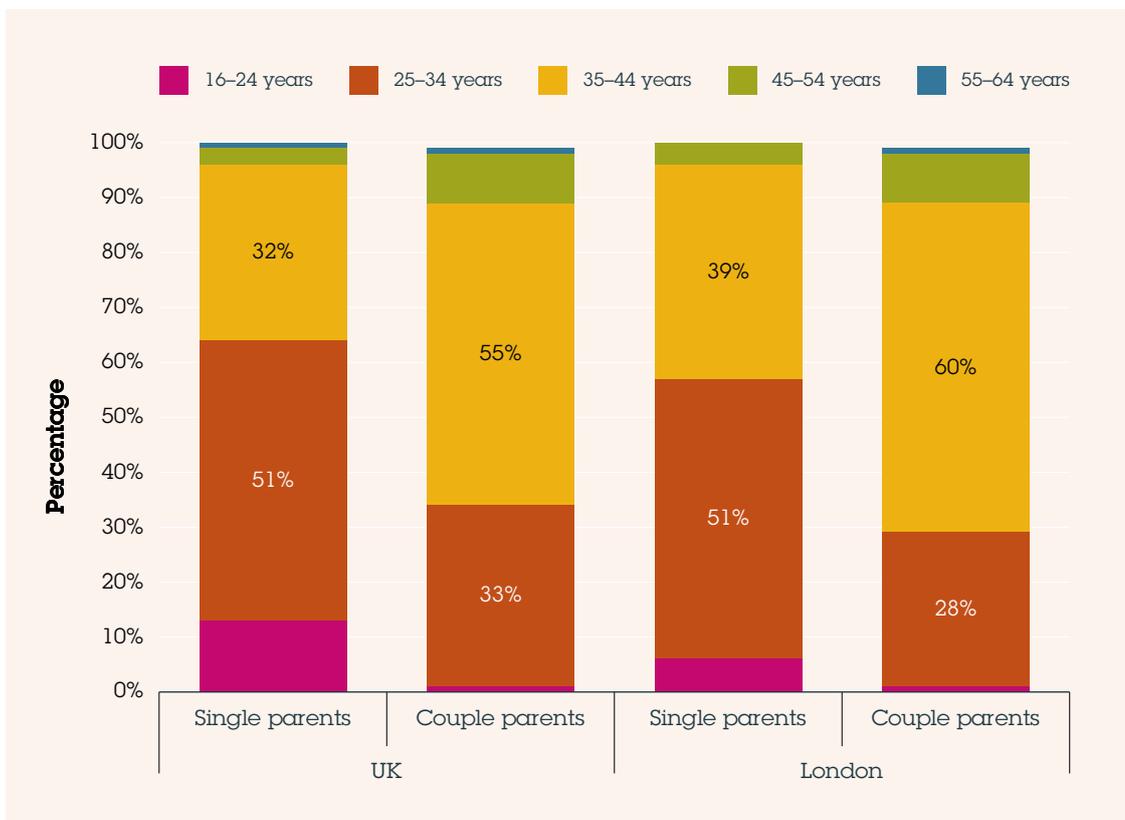


Figure 4:
Age group, by parental status, UK and London, 2019

Source: Labour Force Survey (four quarterly data sets for 2019 combined)

⁷ Columns do not total 100% as those respondents who were recorded as having an "other qualifications" have been removed. 'Other' qualifications include qualifications which it was not possible to re-code to any of the other available levels in back-coding.

It is well-documented that those with fewer educational qualifications find it harder to secure and progress in work (Resolution Foundation, 2014).

A number of factors are known to be associated with levels of education, including age. Figure 4 shows that single parents with pre-school aged children were, on average, younger than couple parents with similarly-aged children; in London, 57% of single parents were aged 34 years and under, compared with just 30% of couple parents. This pattern is reflected in the UK in general although both types of parents in London tend to be slightly older.

Summary:

A distinct population

In summary, we found that single parents with pre-school aged children in the capital are relatively distinct, compared both with couple parents with similarly aged children and with other single parents. They have significantly lower employment rates and fewer educational qualifications on average, patterns that are replicated in the UK as a whole but which are rather more pronounced in London. These patterns have clear policy implications. The lower employment rates of this group mean that a greater proportion will be subject to the new job-seeking requirements, than would be the case for other populations, while their tendency to be younger and lower-skilled suggest that job-seeking may be particularly challenging.

Qualitative findings



Attitudes to and experiences of the new job-seeking requirements

We spoke to 16 single parents of pre-school aged children in London all of whom were in receipt of or were about to transfer onto UC and so were subject to the new job-seeking requirements. Further details on the characteristics of our qualitative sample are presented in the Appendix.

Attitudes to the policy change

There were mixed views among the single parents we spoke to as to the desirability of work requirements for single parents with pre-school aged children.

While some felt that this was a reasonable ask, others disagreed because they thought the specified age at which this requirement was introduced (three years) was too young. This was a common view in our focus group, with one parent stating: “I think it is better if the child is really in primary full-time”.

Among some parents, there was a feeling that a generic requirement, which did not take account of the different situations facing single parents, was not desirable. In particular, it was felt that there was little recognition that single parents have widely differing levels of external support, especially for the provision of informal childcare, which can ease the process of securing and maintaining a job.

Sarah stated that it is reasonable for single parents to be asked to work around 16 hours a week when their children are pre-school age. However, she recognised that this will depend on the wider support available to help someone to work (such as having parents or, for others, having help from an ex-partner). A parent in the focus group endorsed this view, stating, “I don’t even have support with friends or family”. In a similar vein, Marni stated, “It should be voluntary, because looking after a child when you are alone and don’t have any support it’s not easy it is hard work”.

“Looking after a child when you are alone and don’t have any support it’s not easy it is hard work”

In other instances, disapproval of the policy was based on the fact that individuals had encountered a number of difficulties, when trying to fulfil the job-seeking requirement, leading them to conclude that it was not realistic. Justifying their stance, they stated

“I want to work and I have been trying but I can’t find anything.”

– Focus group participant

“It’s not always easy to find hours that work around your family commitments. I don’t think people should be forced into work.”

– Hannah

We consider single parents’ experiences of meeting the job-seeking requirement in the next sections; what is clear at this stage is that, for many, difficulties in this area helped to shape their lack of support for this being a generic requirement for parents of pre-school aged children.

Experiences of seeking work

In this section, we discuss single parents’ actual experiences of finding and undertaking at least 16 hours of work per week, in line with the new requirement, while caring for pre-school age children. A number of themes emerge; finding suitable work was a challenge; childcare often did not play a supporting role in this process; experiences of JCP and UC support often hindered the process; while not all flexibilities were widely understood and implemented. Taken together, these factors made the process of seeking work problematic for almost all of the single parents we spoke to.

Finding suitable work

Finding suitable flexible work for at least 16 hours a week was widely perceived to be very challenging. Prevalent among single parents is the view that jobs which satisfied the requirement to work 16 hours, in a way that fitted in with childcare and other commitments, were highly desirable and hard to come by. Single parents talked about the difficulty of finding jobs that fitted in with childcare and the “golden” middle of the day 10-2pm jobs. One single parent in our focus group stated, *“We just want the 10-2 jobs and that’s hard: they are the popular jobs”*.

Another single parent in the focus group, who had recently decided that the best job for her while her children are so young was to be a dinner lady, stated *“I’ve applied but there are so many people applying for the same job in my area”*.

Meena, on the other hand had chosen to go into self-employment because she found it so difficult to find flexible or part-time work that allowed her time with her daughter. Describing the difficulties she faced, she emphasized that there is, *“a real shortage of part-time work ...there are lots of people chasing the 10-2 jobs”*. Rebecca also chose to move into self-employment because she found it hard to sustain a PAYE job which lacked the flexibility that she needed to care for her son, stating, *“I’ve done that really because I am a*

“It’s not always easy to find hours that work around your family commitments. I don’t think people should be forced into work”

single parent. I was not getting any support from my employer...there was no working from home and there were very few options if my son was sick. I had to either pretend to be sick in order to get paid or not get paid for the time off”.

The prevailing shortage of part-time flexible work has been documented by Timewise, who found in 2019 that over 15% of jobs in the UK are advertised with flexibility, with London being slightly behind on 14% (Timewise, 2019). It was also identified as a potential barrier to the roll-out of conditionality for parents of pre-school aged children in research undertaken by Gingerbread in 2017, based on data collection in the London Borough of Camden (Dewar and Ben-Galim, 2017). In addition, the current rules state that flexible or part-time working can only be requested once someone has been in a job for six months, meaning that single parents cannot secure this at the outset.

The issue of needing to travel to and from work and between work and childcare provision in London was also problematic, as this increased, so too did the amount of time required in order to be able to undertake a role for 16 hours per week. As one single parent in our focus group stated, “You have to pick a bus to go to the job, maybe one hour is already lost”.

A separate issue to emerge was the challenges presented to job-hunting by having limited technology available. Those single parents who did not have a computer at home felt that this made applying for jobs much more difficult. A single parent who attended our focus group stated that, “A lot of jobs are online and not everyone has computers. And then you’ve got to do it through the phone...and sometimes you have got to print stuff off... and some pages you can’t go on because your phone’s not suited for it”.

Similarly another single parent from the focus group indicated that, “Before you could go into the jobcentre and look for different jobs. But now they always say you have got to go online and if you find a job you have to apply online. We don’t have a computer (at home)”.

The role of childcare

Single parents with pre-school aged children necessarily need to locate suitable childcare at the same time as securing a job of 16 hours per week. As noted above, this placed extra constraints on the roles they could apply for, as they needed to factor in the time needed to travel to and from childcare, as well as to and from work.

A range of other issues relating to the availability and cost of childcare were identified, which made the possibility of securing a job offer and childcare which both worked in sync and were affordable particularly remote.

The availability of childcare impacted on the jobs single parents could apply for in a number of ways. While finding any childcare at all could be a problem, issues tended to relate to the need to find childcare which matched with the hours required to undertake a job. Tove, whose daughter goes to a private nursery, depicted this situation as, “a vicious cycle where you can’t find the childcare, but you need to get a job, but you can’t go to the job until you

“A lot of jobs are online and not everyone has computers. And then you’ve got to do it through the phone... and sometimes you have got to print stuff off... and some pages you can’t go on because your phone’s not suited for it”

“[It’s] a vicious cycle where you can’t find the childcare, but you need to get a job, but you can’t go to the job until you have sufficient childcare”

have sufficient childcare”.

On a similar note, a parent in the focus group who used the free 15 hours of childcare, but did not do sufficient hours of work to get the 30 hours provision, stated that, “15 hours, it does help, but when you have certain ones that will only say...certain places will only take them for three hours, it does not help whatsoever. Because by the time you have dropped them off, to go anywhere to work it is impossible to get back to pick them up”.

In this instance, the way the nursery offered childcare hours spread over the week made it hard to use this provision to support being in work.

For some parents, such mismatches required moving children from their existing provision in order to access the precise hours needed to undertake a job, and the sometimes lengthy settling in process this could involve. This was a particular issue for single parents who secured the 15 hours of free childcare but for whom their childcare provider could not increase to the 30 hours if they moved into work. One single parent in the focus group stated that her current nursery would find it difficult to increase their hours if she moved into work meaning, in this scenario, “I am going to have to change the whole nursery and that does not make sense, he has been there a long time...I would have to find another nursery and then settle him”.

The lack of sufficient childcare availability is known to be a UK-wide problem. In 2019, the Coram Childcare survey reported that 74% of local authorities had childcare sufficiency in all areas for the three and four year old 15 hour entitlement, while this was the case for 62% in relation to the 30 hour entitlement for this age group. While the situation in Inner London was somewhat better (with 91% and 64% sufficiency respectively), in Outer London it was considerably worse (with 53% sufficiency for this age group, for both the 15 and 30 hours entitlements) (Coleman and Cotteril, 2019).

Childcare availability could also prove problematic for single parents whose children had additional needs. Bella told us that her son’s autism means that it is more difficult to find a childminder; whilst she has found one with training in SEN, she has to pay the full costs herself, as the childminder does not want to use the government 15 hours offer. Needing to find childcare equipped to deal with her child’s additional needs limited the range of childcare, and thus work, options available to Bella.

In addition to its availability, the cost of formal childcare was also identified as a major issue, as reflected in the following statements by a range of single parents:

“Childcare should be free when they are pre-school aged.” – Hannah

“Childcare is way too expensive and should be available for free from when your child is 18 months old.”

– Meena

“Childcare is too expensive in London. It is difficult to find affordable childcare that fits in with available jobs”.

– Mary



“Childcare is too expensive in London. It is difficult to find affordable childcare that fits in with available jobs”

The latest data from the Coram Childcare Survey shows that prices for childcare in London are significantly higher than for England as a whole, with prices for Inner London being significantly higher again than those for Outer London. (Coleman and Cotteril, 2019).

Whilst there is the promised subsidy of up to 85% for childcare under UC, childcare still proves too expensive for many single parents. Issues with costs are exacerbated by the need for parents to pay childcare deposits to secure a place and childcare costs are paid a month in arrears under UC.

One single parent, Hannah, stated that, “I could not find that money to keep paying childcare and then waiting a whole month to receive it back. It was £800, it was ridiculous and that was most of my salary, so it did not make sense”.

Since then, Hannah has moved to a job with fewer hours and has an arrangement with her current nursery that she can pay at the end of the month rather than in advance. Discussing this new arrangement, she stated, “it is frustrating that it almost puts you into debt, because if it was not for the nursery agreeing that I could pay in arrears, I would not have been able to find the money to pay the nursery for the month, and then gone through the whole month. I’d just have got myself into more and more debt. It’s a really terrible system”.

Overall, there was an acknowledgement that having informal childcare available made the process of securing work much easier; this matches with the view, noted earlier, that the work requirement for parents of pre-school aged children is less reasonable for those who do not have access to such support. One single parent, Tove, stated that, “Obviously being a single parent, having to raise my child by myself it was quite difficult to be able to do that with a lack of support from family, it made it much harder for me to get back to work...I don’t really have anyone I can leave her with, so my concern was that if I want to go to interviews and stuff, what would I do in terms of looking after her because she only goes to nursery one day a week”.

Another single parent, Meena indicated that, in addition to attending the nursery attached to the local primary school, her daughter also goes to her father some of the time, something which enabled her to work.

Experiences of UC and JCP support

The single parents we interviewed had had varied experiences of transferring to UC and receiving JCP support in relation to the new work requirement for parents of pre-school aged children.

Transferring to UC: a lack of clarity

The perceived lack of clarity regarding the impact of moving to UC on personal finances has been widely documented in other research (Gingerbread, 2018a), and was also highlighted by the single parents we

“I could not find that money to keep paying childcare and then waiting a whole month to receive it back. It was £800, it was ridiculous and that was most of my salary, so it did not make sense”

“Obviously being a single parent, having to raise my child by myself it was quite difficult to be able to do that with a lack of support from family, it made it much harder for me to get back to work”

spoke to; this could result in a hesitancy in single parents moving into or sustaining work. Describing a lack of information about the amount of benefit she would receive on UC, Hannah explained, “It’s been stressful. I’ve really struggled. When I was placed on income support in the past it was a lot easier and more straightforward. With universal credit you could ask the same question and get different answers from different people”.

This lack of clarity led some single parents to perceive job-seeking as potentially risky. One single parent, Fiona, stated that, “I have known friends who have taken a job and ended up not earning enough to cover their outgoings and have gone into rent arrears ... Sometimes it is not worth the risk of taking a job”.

Bella was also not provided with the information she needed when she moved over to UC. It was not explained by her work coach that the UC system needs to know childcare levels each month, and this resulted in her missing out on a number of months of childcare support (her situation was slightly complicated as she used three different forms of childcare). Bella explained, “I was not told when I signed up to Universal Credit that I needed to report my childcare costs each month. This meant I lost out on being able to claim this cost over a number of months”.

While some parents were clear about the work requirements associated with their move to UC, in several instances, job requirements were communicated to single parents which did not match those set out in the policy. This was the case for Sarah, who was told in March 2020 that, “you are not meeting the minimum income floor”.

She was advised that she should be working the equivalent of 25 hours a week (and this was set out in her claimant commitment) and “must accept this or she would not be paid”. After checking with the Gingerbread helpline, she went back to the adviser who agreed the requirement was actually 16 hours. The change in hours has not been altered in her claimant commitment, however.

In other instances, it appears that JCP staff themselves were not in agreement regarding what individuals’ work requirements should be. One single parent, Fiona, is now studying full-time but has it stated in her original claimant commitment that she should look for work and be prepared to travel up to an hour each way. She has been unable to get this commitment changed since starting university, stating, “The people at the jobcentre who respond to the journal are all different people each time and they have different opinions about my studying and the amount of money that I should get”.

Support from JCP varied

We found considerable variation in experiences and perceptions of JCP support with regard to the new job-seeking requirement. While some single parents had a named work coach, others did not – and this was generally regarded negatively. One single parent who attended our focus group stated, “Every time you see someone new, you’ve got to explain your situation all over again. You see so many people”.

“It’s been stressful. I’ve really struggled. When I was placed on income support in the past it was a lot easier and more straightforward”

“The people at the jobcentre who respond to the journal are all different people each time and they have different opinions about my studying and the amount of money that I should get”

Similarly, while some single parents were clear about the expectations placed on them and how to communicate through their online journals, amongst others there was a considerable degree of confusion on these matters. Referring to her online journal, one single parent attending our focus group stated, “I don't know what you are meant to do with it, to be honest”.

For some single parents, these experiences had led them to feel unsupported by JCP. This was the case for Sarah, who explained, “I am trying to do my best as a single parent but I do not feel supported by the jobcentre”.

Underlying this, in some instances, was a feeling that JCP did not fully take account of single parents' individual circumstances when providing support. One single parent, Marni, said of her work coach, “So far, they've only really suggested that I work...it just has to be 16 hours. Everything that has been emailed to me is in Central London which is impossible with the kids”.

Such experiences indicate, in some instances, a lack of awareness of the particular difficulties facing single parents when job-seeking, or a clear communication of the flexibilities that should be open to single parents with pre-school aged children.

In a number of instances, single parents were very positive about individualized support made available by JCP to assist with their job search, although this tended to be provided by external providers. One participant in our focus group was grateful to have been referred onto the Grow programme, which was physically based at the jobcentre – a specialist back-to-work provision for mothers in her area. Another single parent, Tove, was referred to Prospect when on Income Support and has since been referred to a programme called Steps into Work, which helps with arranging childcare to facilitate job search.

The perception that JCP support did not take account of individual circumstances was very pervasive among those single parents who were self-employed, or who wished to pursue self-employment, there was a widely-held feeling that their particular work circumstances were not considered by those providing support in relation to their work requirements. Sarah, who wished to pursue self-employment, recalls that she was not offered any specific advice in relation to this and that she felt under pressure to go and work in a childcare nursery, to which she responded, “I've done two training courses in the last couple of years. I have spent thousands of pounds on training courses and now you want me to go and work in a nursery for low wages?”.

Both Sarah and Meena, who are currently self-employed, felt that the hours expectation does not take account of the practicalities of being self-employed and the need to spend uncharged time on 'business-generating' activities, such as marketing. As Sarah explained, “There is a lot of unpaid work you do with self-employment... you are doing admin and other bits and pieces...so I would say that I work 16 hours a week just not physically sitting teaching for 16 hours a week”.

For this group it is arguable that the requirement to do 16 hours paid work a week translates into a somewhat larger time commitment than would be the

“I am trying to do my best as a single parent but I do not feel supported by the jobcentre”

“There is a lot of unpaid work you do with self-employment... you are doing admin and other bits and pieces...so I would say that I work 16 hours a week just not physically sitting teaching for 16 hours a week”

case for many employees – but that the work requirement for parents of pre-school aged children does not account for this in any way.

The role of flexibilities

Single parents reported a lack of information regarding the flexibilities and easements that are available to single parents with pre-school aged children. While most of the single parents were aware that they should work 16 hours a week, some were incorrectly told they should work more hours. None of the single parents who attended the focus group or who were interviewed were told that they could limit their commuting times or could undertake training of up to a year and have their job seeking turned off. Single parents were not referred to written guidance about easements or flexibilities before they signed their claimant commitments.

There was considerable interest among the single parents we spoke to in improving their job prospects by undertaking additional training and education. However, it was not always felt that the systems and staff in place at JCP were working to support this or that the flexibility to train was being communicated to parents. This conflict is epitomized by one of the single parents who attended our focus group, who stated, “I’ve told them I would like to go to school to improve my English, then they say “You have to get a job”.

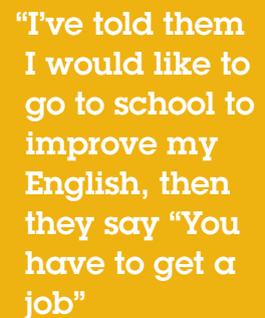
It is clear, however, that the attitudes conveyed by work coaches in relation to training were varied; Marnie’s work coach had been supportive of her going to college and improving her English; she reports him responding, “Oh that is fine, you are doing good”, although he had not directly suggested any training to her, despite her expressed interest in doing an apprenticeship.

Some single parents felt that training offered considerable potential to improve their job prospects; Fiona stated that, “whilst your children are of pre-school age you should have the opportunity to study and increase your skills”, while a single parent who attended our focus group argued, “If they helped towards apprenticeships or other ways for people to get into the career they want, it would be a big difference”.

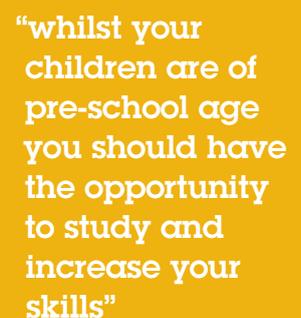
Those single parents who had moved into self-employment, or who had wished to do so, were particularly interested in receiving more bespoke training. This was the case for Sarah, who suggested, “I think that they could (give) you a bit of ... maybe a free business course or some business advice or some support in terms of self-employment, something to help the business thrive”.

This view was shared by Meena who feels that jobcentres could do more, “especially for single parents that don’t have their skills and experience... jobcentres should be there to help parents identify their skills and help those who want to move into self-employment”.

A number of single parents identified the lack of funding for childcare for single parents who are in education or training as a particular barrier to them taking advantages of such flexibilities. As Mary stated, “it is hard to go



“I’ve told them I would like to go to school to improve my English, then they say “You have to get a job”



“whilst your children are of pre-school age you should have the opportunity to study and increase your skills”

on a course and improve your job prospects if you cannot access enough childcare. It is unfair that the additional 15 hours of childcare are only open to you when you are working.”

Support for single parents: discussions with JCP

To further contextualise single parents’ experiences of JCP support, we reviewed the information available to them online. Our research suggested that there is limited information available for single parents with pre-school aged children about their rights and responsibilities in relation to UC.

There is broad information online for families claiming UC that is particularly focused on their responsibilities.⁸ In terms of having a pre-school aged child there is reference to the easement to be able to apply for more restricted hours of work but broader flexibilities are not included in the information. There is no requirement for single parents to have read the information before they sign their claimant commitments.

To gain a sense of the work being undertaken with single parents specifically, in relation to the new policy requirement, Gingerbread arranged meetings with two Partnership Managers at JCP.⁹ Both JCP teams provided evidence of examples of work with single parents to aid the process of securing and sustaining work. In North London, this included a jobs fair in 2019 with Islington Council that was focused on single parents, working on a scheme in Camden and Barnet to support single parents to gain training and qualifications that included a buddy scheme to help these parents into work and a guaranteed interview with employers in the scheme, and outreach work including engagement with family centres and children’s centres. In South London, activities included outreach teams that worked in children’s centres, and two specific funded contracts in Lambeth and Southwark and in Croydon and Sutton that focus on single parent support.

While such activities are likely to have a positive impact on single parents’ job-seeking and employment, in no case was support tailored on the basis of children’s ages (and the specific challenges associated with having children in the youngest age group). More broadly, jobcentres largely employ generic work coaches (apart from some specialist support for claimants with disabilities) to support single parents.

Support, including access to training, was also dependent on the borough of residence. There was a noted lack of communication of the distinct easements and flexibilities that might be open to single parents with pre-school aged children looking for work. A lack of knowledge among single parents regarding what they can ask for in terms of these easements and flexibilities will make it difficult to make the writing of their claimant commitments a genuine two-way exercise. It was felt that the process currently over-relies on work coaches sharing this information and letting single parents know of the flexibilities that could be open to them.

“It is hard to go on a course and improve your job prospects if you cannot access enough childcare. It is unfair that the additional 15 hours of childcare are only open to you when you are working”

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-and-your-family-quick-guide/universal-credit-further-information-for-families>, accessed 2020

⁹ Gingerbread met with two Partnership Managers at JCP in North London) and South London to discuss these issues on 4 June 2020.

The Covid-19 crisis and the future

Clearly, the single parents we talked to had experienced a range of difficulties in meeting the new job-seeking requirements, some of which will have been affected by the absence of bespoke support for this population discussed above. The Covid-19 crisis will inevitably have exacerbated some of these difficulties.

While it is widely argued that the full impact of the UK Lockdown on unemployment is yet to be realized, given the support provided by the Job Retention Scheme, (Office for National Statistics, 2020c), there has been a marked decline in advertised vacancies to date; between April to June 2020 there were 333,000 advertised vacancies, 23% lower than the previous low record in April to June 2009, following the 2008 financial crash (Office for National Statistics, 2020a), although the latest data suggests this drop has begun to be reversed (Office for National Statistics, 2020b). At the same time, the government has seen a surge in claims for UC; between 13th March and 9th April 2020 there were 1.5 million claims made to UC, more than six times the number in the same period in 2019. This resulted in the number of people on UC increasing by 40% in one month (Department for Work and Pensions, 2020a). As of May 2020, there were 1,035,165 single parents in receipt of UC (162,197 of whom were in London (Department for Work and Pensions, 2020b).

Meanwhile, a survey by the Early Years Alliance undertaken in April 2020 found that one in four nurseries, pre-schools and childminders in England believe it is “unlikely” that they will still be operating in 12 months’ time, partly as a result of the Covid-19 crisis (Early Years Alliance, 2020). Taken together, these trends mean that the job-seeking requirements for single parents with pre-school aged children will be even harder to achieve going forward; there are fewer available vacancies, is likely to be less support from JCP due to an increase in caseload (although the government has promised a doubling in the number of work coaches) and the issue of balancing work and caring is likely to be even more challenging (in addition to a decline in formal childcare, many may lose access to informal childcare options, due to health concerns about grandparents for example). Describing their journeys through the early stage of Lockdown, the single parents we spoke to alluded to many of these impacts:

- Hannah asked to be furloughed early on because her young son has asthma. She noted that, prior to March, the same person responded to queries in her online journal “**but I have noticed since then it’s been different people every time**”.
- Sarah’s work has declined since lockdown. She indicated, “**I can’t work as much as I would have liked because of lack of childcare at the moment**”. Since lockdown her daughter’s nursery has closed. She has had to reduce her course fees in order to attract clients.
- The hours of Meena’s business have really diminished since lockdown. On average she is working between 5-10 hours a week. She has much less work including the cancelling of a 4 hour a day job. She has to work whilst also caring for her daughter whose nursery is closed.



“I can’t work as much as I would have liked because of lack of childcare at the moment”

- Bella has been working from home but has found this a real challenge as her son has a lot of energy. She is worried about returning to work. She is also worried about her son's health as a result of him going to at least two childcare settings and thinks it will be difficult for her elderly parents to step in as they are in a vulnerable group. Bella told us, "I am worried about what will happen if the school opens and I am expected to go back to work. I am so worried of the impact of Covid-19 on me in terms of the higher risk that it poses for someone like me who is asthmatic and is black. This has pushed me to write a will. What will happen to my son if something happens to me?".
- Fiona has tried to study and look after her two children during lockdown but it has been challenging.

The government paused the job-seeking requirement for all claimants for three months during the Covid-19 lockdown and suspended the Minimum Income Floor for those who were self-employed. While the Lockdown has begun to be lifted, the impacts of the Covid-19 crisis are a vital context in which we have formulated our recommendations for single parents with pre-school aged children.

**"I am so worried of the impact of Covid-19 on me in terms of the higher risk that it poses for someone like me who is asthmatic and is black...
What will happen to my son if something happens to me?"**

Recommendations

Gingerbread want the government to deliver on the personalised support that it promised for single parents on UC with pre-school aged children.

This is particularly important in London (where these parents tend to be younger, less qualified and less likely to be in work). Urgent action is needed for single parents with pre-school aged children in London to set them on a better path to improving their skills, having access to consistent support and affordable and accessible childcare. Setting single parents up for more sustainable work while their children are young will help with the prosperity of their families in the longer term.

Gingerbread is calling for recommendations for change from both national and local government in London.

National recommendations

- The DWP must provide clear written communication about the easements and flexibilities that are open to single parents with pre-school aged children including shorter commuting times, lower hours of work and opportunities to train. All single parents must be provided with this information in writing, prior to agreeing to a claimant commitment. All single parents with pre-school aged children must also have access to a named work coach.
- Claimant commitments should be agreed as part of a genuine two-way process, taking into account the circumstances of single parents and how they might be supported into work. In light of current inconsistencies in claimant commitments, we call for a second work coach to always review the content of claimant commitments for claimants with pre-school aged children.
- Jobcentres should provide specialist provision for single parents or work coaches should make referrals to specialist providers and career coaching. The Chancellor has pledged resources for extra career advisers. These should be targeted towards this group of single parents.
- Single parents with limited technology should be allowed priority access in libraries and jobcentres to computers. Clearer information must be made available as to the role of the online journal with support for those who find this technology challenging.
- The government should publicise that training and skills acquisition is open to single parents of pre-school aged children for up to a year. It should ensure that policies in relation to skills and childcare are joined-up. Specifically, the 30 hours policy should be open to those who are improving their skills and training.



Claimant commitments should be agreed as part of a genuine two-way process

Jobcentres should provide specialist provision for single parent

- Jobcentres should provide better support for single parents who are self-employed or who are considering self-employment. The Minimum Income Floor should be suspended for an additional year to allow greater time for single parents to build up their businesses post Covid-19; subsequently, there needs to be less rigidity around the need to work (receive pay for) a minimum of 16 hours for this group of parents.
- The DfE must urgently review the current operation of the 30 hour offer to make it more compatible with the realities of seeking a job and working. In addition, the mechanics of financial support for childcare under UC need to be reviewed. It is a clear barrier to single parents with the youngest children to move into and sustain a job when they have to pay their childcare costs in advance each month.
- BEIS and DWP must work together to open up opportunities for more part-time and flexible work including incentivising businesses to open up vacancies on a job-share basis through their 'find a job' website.

Jobcentres should provide better support for single parents who are self-employed or who are considering self-employment

London recommendations

- The DWP should pilot a London-wide Childcare Deposit Scheme for pre-school aged childcare including deposits and the first month's advance payment for those parents on UC who are entering or increasing their hours of work. This should be universally available and paid for from a specific fund, rather than being drawn on a discretionary basis from the Flexible Support Fund as is currently the case. This could be based on the successful scheme devised by Gingerbread and developed by the GLA.
- Regional JCP Managers in London should better co-ordinate support for single parents with pre-school aged children from specialist providers and ensure that this support is publicised so that parents can more consistently benefit from these schemes. There should be a greater emphasis on single parents with pre-school aged children receiving advice and support within Family and Children's Centres.
- Regional JCP Managers in London should publicise the training flexibility that is open to these single parents to train for up to a year and must better co-ordinate training and support with local colleges and providers across the London Boroughs.
- The GLA, London Councils and regional JCP Partnership Managers should work together to improve the support offered to single parents with pre-school aged children post Covid-19. In particular, we call on the Recovery Board that is led by the GLA to support training and flexible jobs for these single parents, with the recognition that this group of parents have been hard hit by the Covid-19 crisis – and without additional support their economic inequality will grow. Local Councils should consider a register of employers in the London Boroughs who offer flexible and part-time work including school hours.

There should be a greater emphasis on single parents with pre-school aged children receiving advice and support within Family and Children's Centres

Appendix

Methodology

Details of quantitative analysis

Analysis was undertaken of the government's quarterly Labour Force Survey (LFS), using the household data-sets. As the samples of single parents with a youngest child of pre-school age (3-4 years) in the capital were necessarily small, data-sets for the four quarters of 2019 were merged to achieve a sufficient number of single parents of this type, to facilitate more detailed analysis.

Details of qualitative data collection and analysis

In November 2019 we ran a focus group in Hillingdon with seven single parents with children aged between two and four years of age, who were already on or were about to transfer onto UC. The focus group included a mix of parents who were in or were looking for work. These parents tended to have fewer educational qualifications than average, leading to their involvement in seeking training. Single parents were recruited through an advertisement in the local library in Hillingdon, where the event was held, and through the **Grow programme** that runs support and back to work services for disadvantaged parents. Each of the participants received a £20 shop voucher to thank them for giving up their time.

Between May and June 2020, we interviewed an additional nine single parents. These single parents were recruited by advertisement through Gingerbread's London Groups and newsletter. All nine single parents were on UC and were sampled to ensure diversity in terms of levels of education, working patterns, employment status, number of children and ethnicity. These single parents were drawn from a range of London Boroughs including Croydon, Islington, Waltham Forest, Brent, Enfield, Hounslow and Hammersmith and Fulham. All nine single parents were interviewed over the telephone and received a £20 shopping voucher as a thank you for their time.



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