



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Universal Credit in the UK: claimants' early experiences and expectations

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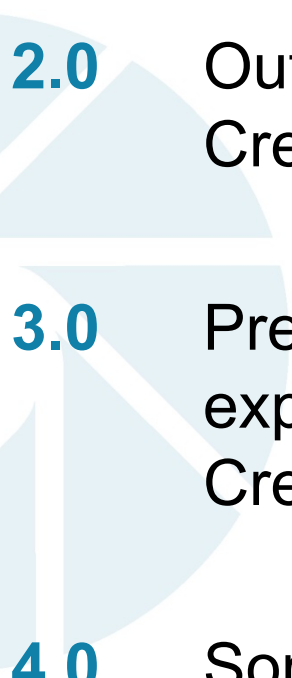
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An ESRC large grant



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 - 2.0** Outline introduce some key element of Universal Credit
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Welfare conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour change (2013-2018)

Twin aims

- To consider the ethics and efficacy of welfare conditionality

Fieldwork with three sets of respondents

1. Semi-structured interviews with 40 KIs policymakers/actors
2. 24 focus groups (6-10 respondents) with frontline welfare practitioners who implement policy
3. Three rounds of repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews with a diverse sample of 480 welfare recipients who are subject to conditionality i.e. 1440 interviews in total.

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Welfare conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour change (2013-2018)

- **Exploring welfare conditionality across a range of policy domains and groups**

Recipients of social security benefits (unemployed people, lone parents, disabled people, UC), homeless people, social tenants, individuals/families subject to antisocial behaviour orders/family intervention projects, offenders and migrants

- **Locations in England and Scotland**

Bath, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, **Inverness**, London, **Manchester**, Peterborough, **Salford**, Sheffield, Warrington

Universal Credit (2013-2017)

- **Replaces 6 means tested benefits**

JSA, ESA, IS, WTC, CTC, HB

- **Purpose**

Simplify working age benefits; make work pay; increase take-up reducing fraud and error (DWP: 2010a, b).

- **Administrative changes**

An adjustable single monthly payment dependant on earnings (in arrears), digital by default, claimant commitment, routine 35 hours job search requirement,

- **Introduced 'in work' conditionality**

Low paid workers on UC can be required to see further work/ better paid work below the 'conditionality threshold'

The claimant commitment

Goes through the motions, 'Sign there'. He doesn't even look at you. He goes to the fax machine, he prints everything off, 'Right, sign there, initial there, sign there' and he's not even looking at you..., 'If you don't do that, we'll sanction you. If you don't do that we'll sanction' - everything is a sanction, sanction, sanction, that's all you get (WSU-MA-KJ-017a)

I had to agree to look at newspapers. I'd to agree to talk to people, ask people. I had to agree to use the internet, their site, websites, I'd go to people's premises and chat with the owners there too (WSU-GL-AS-041A)

I showed my manager here, I said 'look like this is why I feel criminalised.' I says, 'Look at how many time you're threatened to have your money cut.' And she was shocked. So when you sign on you get your claimant commitment, once you go to see your job coach you get your claimant commitment form, right, and there's a couple of pieces of paper, you've got to carry it about with you. Yes, it's just all threats. (WSU-BA-JM-014a)

35 hours job search

35 hours each week. That was made clear at the beginning, yes. So if you don't do the amount of work then you're going to get sanctioned, you won't receive your money and obviously I'm getting paid monthly so it affects me even more than someone that's getting paid every fortnight (WSU-BA-JM-009a)

It's like being bullied, 'If you don't do as I tell you, I'm going to take some money off you'. Who could look for work for eight hours a day and go out looking for work for eight hours a day with no money... Yes, you've got to - cold calling they call it, knocking on firms' doors and this, that and the other...I think it's ridiculous. Who does that? Not only that; when you're on Universal Credit, who has got the finances to do that? (WSU-MA-KJ-017a)

The girls are very, very nice up at the Jobcentre...They're helpful if they can be, but I suppose they've just got to go with their guidelines as well... Well I have to go on the computer and at least look for jobs and you've to, if you look at a paper you've to write down how long it took you to look at that paper... itemise everything so they can see how many hours you are actually looking for work... now you just go on to a computer and they can tell right away (WSU-GL-SW-005a)

Low paid workers' experiences UC: shortfalls and sanctions

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I'm £2500 in debt with them, I've got rent arrears and just trying to sort of like survive, I can't do it on my weekly payments... that's when I'm working, to sort of like to get that money, I'm not sat on benefit waiting to get benefits... I've got no Universal Credit this month because apparently I earned too much. (WSU-BA-JM-014a)

I was working at the time, so it didn't make any difference... it was something like 'we're going to charge you £10 a day for seven days' and I said, 'What, you're going to fine me 70 quid for missing an appointment that I couldn't even ring you to tell you that I'd be late (WSU-BA-JM 008a)

It's a bit degrading... my adviser, she isn't too bad. She says to me most times, 'I'm quite happy with what you're doing, and obviously you want to work because you're working, and it's not as though you're not looking for jobs'. But like they're always checking up on you. They always want to know... 'If I wasn't happy with you, we can sanction you'... Every other meeting it's kind of there... a reminder that like keep on doing what you're doing, otherwise this will happen to you. (WSU-BA-JM-005a)



Payment methods: promoting responsibility?

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I've got a lot of friends who will spend it because they'll think to themselves well, I'm going out for the weekend... These people don't have any money then somebody turns round and gives you £250 in your bank account (WSU-GL-AS-041a)

Not give my rent money, basically... Because like I said to my job adviser, if I've got that money and I need it, I'm going to spend it. It was never explained to me that part of my money going into my bank was for my rent.. I'm now £1700 in rent arrears (WSU-BA-JM-005a)

Giving people their rent money I think that's a bad thing. As I say, the likes of myself, I'd rather have a roof over my head so I make sure my money's paid, but a lot of people might not. (WSU-GL-SW-005a)

Jobseeker's it's every two weeks. .. You knew that you were going to be able to cope because you knew what sort of money you had for the certain amount of weeks so it was just easier to manage... I was so far behind with my rent... I'm still having to catch up now so each payment I get I'm still behind (WSU-BA-JM-009A)

Support?

The phone, it's not the cheapest. Like I get £10 a month on my phone, and it's 0345 number, which is quite expensive. If you phone it a long time, you're in a queue for 20 minutes, that's the best part of your £10 gone (WSU-BA-JM-005a)

He'd got this Universal Job Search up and this, that and the other. The guy said to me, 'There's a job there in [town] Library'. In a library I've been in the building trade 40 years and he wanted me to apply for administration in a library. (WSU-MA-KJ-017a)*

They're very nice. The Jobcentre used to try and help you find work, you'd go in and they'd get on the computer and say, 'Oh we've got that many jobs today.' That doesn't happen anymore. They don't really help you to find a job. They just help you to sign on every two weeks. (WSU-MA-KJ-031A)

Early thoughts/emergent themes on UC

- The Jobcentre's primary role is perceived to be *disciplinary* policing job search and *enforcing* sanctions, rather than *enabling* people to get jobs
- Lots of sanction, limited support from the Jobcentre, UC support is seen as distant and anonymous
- Claimant commitment a one sided 'contract'
- Many are *not against* conditionality in principle: they expect and even defend it, but think it is being punitively/disproportionately applied
- 35 hours a week job search *limits* employment opportunities
- Those in work (some with multiple jobs) resent the application of conditionality whilst they are working
- Payment delays, often compounded by administrative errors, abound. These promote hardship, push people into debt and trigger reliance on charity or family members to survive
- Some easy gains could be made to improve the situation, e.g. revert to fortnightly payments, direct payments of housing element to landlords



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