

FIRST WAVE FINDINGS: Offenders

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Around a quarter of a million people enter the criminal justice system in England and Wales each year to serve a sentence or undertake supervision. Some are relatively close to the labour market but many others experience multiple and profound barriers to employment. This briefing paper presents indicative findings from our research undertaken to date and is based on interviews with 57 offenders.

Key findings

- Many respondents have multiple and profound barriers to employment, including mental health problems, drug and/or alcohol addictions, literacy and numeracy difficulties and poor vocational skills. Virtually all had been imprisoned. Many of those serving short sentences have had very little support to prepare for their release.
- Most have had some work experience albeit predominantly of an episodic, low paid and chronically insecure nature. There is significant experience of cash-in-hand work. Long-term labour market detachment is an issue for some.

Criminal enterprises revolving around the supply of drugs are also evident.

- Very few appear to have had 'day one' access to the Work Programme.
- Jobcentre Plus is primarily viewed as a benefits agency; most find work through other channels. Many respondents felt that the focus of the agency has changed from providing support to sanctioning. A lack of understanding and empathy on the part of front-line staff were frequent complaints.
- Most of those with a history of claiming JSA have incurred multiple sanctions and gone without benefits for long periods. Some now claim more appropriate benefits with less stringent conditionality attached. This change was often brought about by GPs, drug/alcohol support workers and even Jobcentre staff.
- Benefit sanctions have led to family conflict; worsening mental health; homelessness; engagement in survival crime and disengagement from the benefits system.
- A very small number of respondents reported positive impacts. Principal among these was the impetus to switch to more appropriate benefits and seeking help with drug and alcohol addictions. Positive behavioural change was more usually associated with other changes in people's lives.
- There was widespread support for tying benefit entitlement to behavioural conditions. Yet many thought that the purpose of conditional welfare was to facilitate disentanglement and reduce government expenditure rather than to promote behavioural change. Some felt it was morally wrong.



Pre-release support

Virtually all interviewees had been incarcerated; many had served multiple short sentences while others had served long sentences of more than 10 years. A number had been imprisoned for much of their adult life. Some of those serving longer sentences have had help with maths and English or undertaken vocational training (plastering, construction skills, etc.) whilst in custody. However, this was not a practical proposition for those serving short sentences.

Many have not been adequately prepared for their release into the community.

“ Nothing, just about £60 cash, that’s it, out you go. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

“ I never had nothing, luckily I have got my family, but I never had nothing when I came out. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

Some of those intending to claim JSA had been given letters to give to the Jobcentre to allow them to sign on. Others had been given contact details for hostels. A small number of respondents have received through-the-gates support (see example).

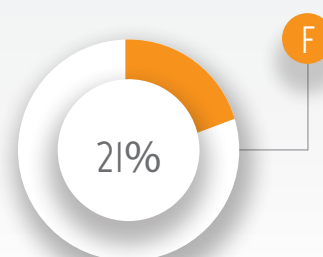
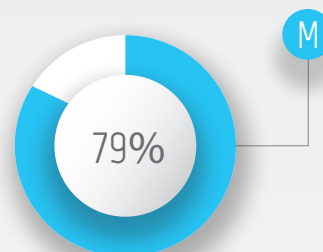
Example: Support for short-sentenced prisoners

A few respondents reported receiving help with finding accommodation, applying for benefits, brokering vocational training (construction), work trials and guaranteed job interviews, luncheon and other vouchers. This support was reported to have made it easier for individuals to comply with the requirements of the Jobcentre. Respondents reported:

“ I don’t know where I’d be without these people... You’re struggling waiting for money to come through and that,

- TOTAL WSUs / 57 -

-GENDER-



they’ll give you some luncheon vouchers... I used to hit the bottle when I used to feel really low... Now rather than hit the bottle I’ll just ring [support worker] up and say ‘Look [support worker] I’m feeling like I’m going to hit the bottle,’ and he’ll say ‘Right do you want to come to speak to someone?’ ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

“ They got me somewhere to live and everything, because like if it wasn’t for these guys I would have been fucked when I got out of prison. Nowhere to go, no family, or nothing like that. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Previous labour market experience

Most had some work experience, often manual work (labouring) in construction, factory work or warehousing. A small number had worked in

services such as call centres, bar work, catering/ fast food and cleaning. A few were former military personnel. Work was often physically demanding but required few qualifications.

“ I’ve been on and off with the labouring and that, trying to get work, but it’s just so hard work as well, it’s really hard. You walk in, in the morning and you see 1,000 bricks and flipping tonnes of ballast and tonnes of soft sand, and you’re like, why did I get up in the morning. [laughs] ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

There is significant experience of cash-in-hand work, especially but not exclusively in construction-related trades, to make ends meet. Work is chronically insecure. A man in Scotland reported:

“ Just labouring, stuff like that. Trying to jump from job to job, really. I would take anything that was going. But you could be working for one day or four days, stuff like that, so it was never anything certain. When you’re working you feel good about yourself; when you’re not working you’re bored and that’s when you’re taking drugs, smoking cannabis, and it leads to other things. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Addictions and mental health problems frequently make holding down any job very difficult. A man in Scotland confessed:

“ I can get a job but I cannot handle the money, you know what I mean? I’m happy skint because I’m not drugged out of my mind. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Criminal enterprises revolving around the supply of drugs are also evident.

Nevertheless, long-term labour market

detachment was an issue for some. A handful of interviewees had never worked and about a fifth of the sample had not worked for 10 years or more. This was sometimes due to long prison sentences but more often was due to frequent short sentences. Many of these individuals had multiple and complex needs which make it extremely difficult to contemplate paid work. As primary carers finding work was also less of a priority for some female offenders.

‘Day one’ mandation to the Work Programme

Just one individual in our sample appears to have had ‘day one’ access to the Work Programme.

There appear to be three key contributory factors:

- Many interviewees have serious mental health and drug/alcohol problems which mean that they claim ESA.
- Some were last released from custody before ‘day one’ mandation was introduced.
- Many have had poor experiences of training schemes that had not improved their job prospects.

A female offender appears to have taken up ‘day one’ access. She had been given help to apply for jobs and thought that the experience had been useful - albeit it had not led to work. However, many of those interviewed felt that ‘day one’ mandation was highly problematical.

“ They should understand for the first week or so you’re adjusting to things, sorting everything out. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

“ If you’ve been in prison for 3, 4, 5 years there is a lot of acclimatisation to do. I couldn’t believe what a loaf of bread cost and I’d only been inside for two years. It’s too much stress too quickly. It could be too much for people that have been inside for a while. It is get released, bang, too much. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

A woman in England agreed, reporting in the first few weeks following release:

“ Your head is still inside. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

understandings or needs. They’re worried about cropping the cream off the top and getting their big payment. That’s all they’re worried about. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

The Work Programme

Many of those that had participated in the Work Programme did not see it as providing meaningful support. Some have been ‘parked’.

“ They just sort of let you use the computers and things like that. They didn’t tell you where the vacancies are and that. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

“ There’s a lot of resentment that comes from it. The fact that the staff are pulling flankers left, right and centre. You know to hit the figures. I see it coming. That’s to hit a figure, that’s to hit a figure. It’s a waste of public money. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

There was widespread exasperation at the lack of vocational training opportunities and the undue focus placed on jobsearch support and help with curriculum vitae. Many respondents do not use CVs to gain work. The menial nature of support which led to further stigmatisation was an issue for some respondents.

A few likened it to ‘punishment for unemployment’.

“ It was just like a holding pen. The way I sussed that out was the fact that they, if all these guys are in here, sitting in here, reading papers, blah, blah, from nine o’clock in the morning or half ten in the morning until half four in the afternoon then they’re not out working on the fly. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Community work placements are aimed at claimants whose primary barrier to work is a lack of experience or motivation. It aims to equip jobseekers with a period of experience in a work-based environment enabling them to develop the skills and disciplines associated with sustained employment. Accessing meaningful work placements appears to be a problem.

“ I know a lot of lads are sort of labouring over the way, it’s like a big social enterprise park, but they’re doing nothing. You know they’re there for seven hours a day, and even they’re saying they’re bored. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

“ Just punishment for unemployed people. I don’t think it’s helping people into work. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

Jobcentre Plus support

Jobcentre Plus is seen as a benefits agency; many offenders find work (formal and informal) through their own social networks.

“ The only thing they’re [Jobcentre Plus] good for is your benefit. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

The privatisation of employment support was an issue for some interviewees.

“ They’re not worried about my

Some complained about how long it took them to receive benefits following release from prison. A woman in England sought to make a new claim:

“ And when I rung benefits up saying ‘how long will it take?’ they turned around and said to me, ‘Well you came out of prison with £47 [discharge grant], what have you done with that?’ And from the social that is totally the wrong attitude because how can anybody live on £47 for four weeks, knowing you’ve got no gas, no electric, no food? ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

Virtually all indicated that it was right to expect those claiming JSA to look for work. However, many felt unsupported in a process that was becoming more draconian.

“ They just quickly look at your book, tell you to sign, have you looked for jobs? Yes, all right off you go. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

There was widespread scepticism about the efficacy of the Universal Jobmatch website:

- Some reported that being forced to look for work on Universal Jobmatch was a meaningless box ticking exercise.

“ If the jobs are there, fair enough, but they’re not there. ”

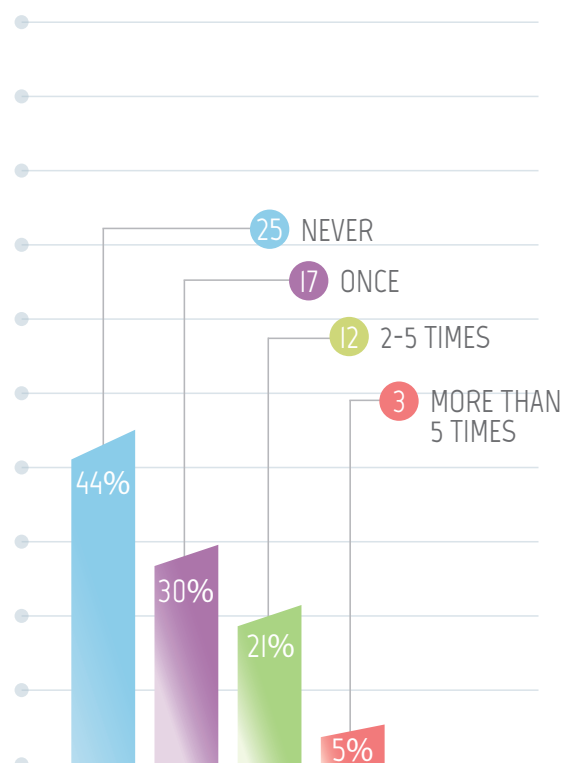
(WSU, offender, male, England)

- Some complained that it was a distraction from more effective job search methods. A man in England reported:

“ The jobcentre say like ‘oh yes, we want you to go on to Universal Jobmatch and look for a job’. But you’re more likely to get a job going into town with your CVs. It’s annoying. You want me to do something that I know for a fact that I’m not going to get a job through. It just pisses me off. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

-BENEFIT SANCTIONS-



- It is explicitly viewed as a source of surveillance by some interviewees.

“ They’ll be so many jobs that I have to look for and you do it through their government website so they can check it. ”

(WSU, offender, female, Scotland)

- Some felt pressured to lie about the extent of their job search.

“ I just had to lie and say I’ve applied for all these jobs, because otherwise I wouldn’t have got the money. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

- Some struggle to use the system because of computer illiteracy.

There was a strong sense that the focus of Jobcentre Plus has changed from helping

individuals into work towards sanctioning.

“ I think the emphasis has changed from support to sanction. Instead of this is what you can do, we’ll help you, it’s this is what we’ll do if you don’t. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

“ They’re strong with the regulations but very weak with their support. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Some of those with long-term experiences of claiming benefits felt that the amount of support provided had fallen.

“ They’ve become more monotonous and robotic in what they do. In the past, it was never just about signing or have you looked for X amount of jobs. If you haven’t I’m going to sanction you. In the past, you had at least 20 minutes with your adviser to get some advice. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

-KEY-

PS refers to policy stakeholder
 FG refers to focus group
 WSU refers to welfare service user

This had led to the criminalisation of benefit claiming.

“ They just treat everybody as if everybody is ripping the system off. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

Relationships with front-line staff

A strongly anti-authoritarian view characterises many respondents (especially young men). Consequently, government support is experienced as surveillance.

“ I’ve got to meet probation once a week, I’ve got to meet a hostel man once a week. I don’t want to see all these fucking people. Well maybe I want support, but not them, fuck, not their support, not government support, do you know what I mean? ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Some offenders have to comply with many different rules and meet a myriad of requirements set by a range of agencies such as the National Probation Service, Community Rehabilitation Companies, Jobcentre Plus, drug treatment providers and hostels.

A lack of understanding and empathy was a frequent complaint.

“ I know they probably see thousands of people, but like I say, we’re not all just numbers, we are people. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

“ They’ve never had to sleep in a doorway thinking hold on a minute, this is bad enough, but now I can’t even feed myself because I’ve got no money. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

However, some recognised that they were aggressive and confrontational.

“ When people have got a hard, tough life... like on the street, you’re going to have a bit of an attitude. Do you know what I mean? You’ve just got to think, like if I’d just won the Lottery I’m sure I wouldn’t have an attitude. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

The inconsistent, arbitrary nature of support received from front-line staff was a recurring theme. Some staff were reported to be sympathetic and supportive whereas others were confrontational.

“ Depending maybe on who they’ve had in before or who they are or how keen they are on their job will go through it (job search evidence) and ask you ‘why didn’t you do this, why didn’t you do that’ but in a very aggressive manner. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Experiences of welfare conditionality

Most of those with a history of claiming JSA have experienced benefit sanctions. Some have incurred multiple sanctions and gone without benefits for periods of up to six months. Two key reasons for sanctioning appear to be failure to attend (FTA); and the provision of insufficient evidence of job search. Drug addictions and mental health problems underpin the inability of many to meet their obligations and behave in the required fashion. Literacy and numeracy problems also appear to have been a contributory factor. A man in England had been sanctioned within three weeks of his release from prison for not providing an adequate written record of job search. He explained:

“ Because I didn’t fill my book in properly, they didn’t really explain to me properly how to do it. I am a bit dyslexic; I can’t read or write practically. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Some have been sanctioned effectively as a result of claiming the wrong benefit. Many individuals with multiple and complex needs related their previous experiences of having wrongly claimed JSA and being sanctioned. Some of those incurring multiple sanctions now claim benefits with fewer conditions, such as ESA. This change was sometimes brought about by GPs (especially for those with mental health problems), drug/alcohol support workers and Jobcentre staff. A man in England with a heroin addiction and a severe personality disorder reported:

“ It’s taken me 20 years to get [on] the right benefits [ESA Support Group]. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Some were unclear why they had been sanctioned; others disputed the justifications given for sanctioning; and others reported that they had not received notification letters. The nomadic nature of some individuals can make official channels of communication problematical. Sanctioning was usually experienced as an impersonal process. The first time that many individuals realised they were being sanctioned was on receipt of a letter; others only when they had tried to get money from their bank accounts and realised that it was empty. Referral to decision makers for a sanction was often seen as devious:

“ There’s a lot of passing the buck, no one must be held to be the bad guy. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Some had been sanctioned following a confrontation. On receiving a sanction:

“ I said look, this is my life you’re talking about here. This is my existence; this is how I’m going to feed myself. Do you realise that you’re dealing with people’s lives here? He said, ‘Well, get a job.’ That’s his response, ‘Get a job’. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Most appear not to have appealed their sanction because:

- They feel powerless.

“ I still feel it’s wrong for the way that they did it [imposition of a sanction], but you can’t stop them, you can’t. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

- They lack the confidence and social capital. A man in England felt frustrated at his inability to explain that his drug addiction meant keeping appointments was difficult:

“ I never had the mental faculties to tell them, to explain it to them. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Another respondent reported:

“ A lot of people in prison don’t have that ability. They can’t read, they can’t write, they don’t know how to put a sentence together. So they’re slightly left by the wayside. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Many respondents indicated that they had, in the short-term, become superficially compliant with the directives of front-line staff.

“ Well you do what they tell you to do and you’re lying. You’re smiling at them. Instead of losing your temper you just smile and say ‘Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir.’ ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Respondents have displayed several very different responses to the imposition of benefit sanctions:

- Resignation: Some suggested that being sanctioned was becoming inevitable:

“ The way I see it if you don’t get a job you’re getting sanctioned. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

- Anger: Some have been banned from Jobcentres, usually for threatening staff or security guards.

“ All he was interested in was job search, job search, job search, that’s all he done. I mean shut up man, you know what I mean, you’re like a broken record. In fact I was even covering my hand sayin, I’ll break your jaw when I get you get outside, you’re getting it. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

- Defiance:

“ They can take the dole money off me because the dole money’s not much. So I can go without the money. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

This person was sanctioned twice for missing appointments (“unless it’s written down I will forget it”) and continued to receive financial support from his partner on both occasions.

- Hurt: A man in Scotland reported:

“ I was utterly humiliated. In fact I was in tears when I left the building. Well I’m going to be homeless. How am I going to feed myself? It had a serious impact on my health. I’m on heavy medication [antidepressants] now. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

- Escapism:

A man in Scotland was sanctioned for failing to provide evidence of job search due to his computer illiteracy.

“ I just found myself taking drugs and burying my head in the sand, basically. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Impacts of welfare conditionality

Benefit sanctions were overwhelmingly associated with negative impacts including:

- Feelings of worthlessness.

“ Some days I would even stay in my house, I wasn’t coming out of it because I had no money... I just felt worthless really. ”

(WSU, offender, male England)

- Deteriorating mental health and growing social isolation.

- Homelessness.

“ That [sanction] led to a period of homelessness. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

- Family strife and conflict.

“ There was also like the trust between myself and my mum, because I was saying that, ‘This is what’s going on, Mum, I’m trying to sort it out,’ and she was getting pressure from her partner, who didn’t want me there. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

- Reduced job search due to apathy and a lack of material resources.

“ Why should I bother looking for work when I’m not getting paid for nothing, you know what I mean? ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

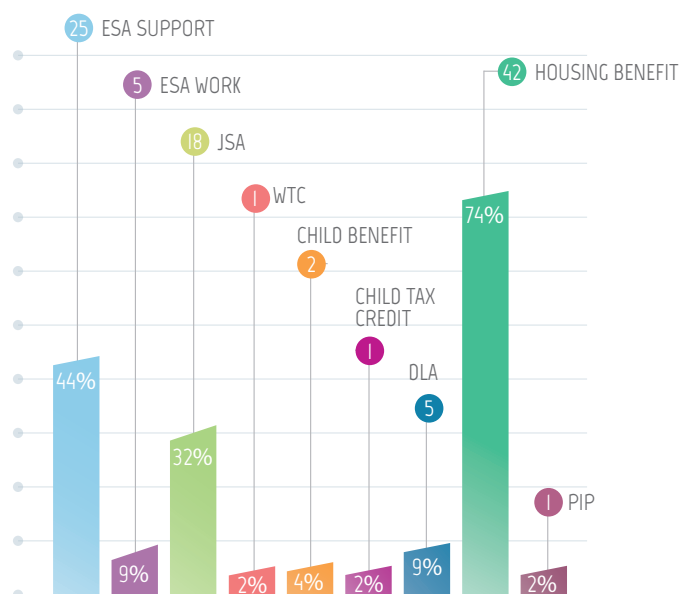
Nevertheless, a few reported positive impacts including:

- The impetus to switch to more appropriate benefits.

“ I just went on the sick. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

-BENEFITS RECEIVED-



- Seeking help with drug and alcohol addictions.

However, most were adamant that positive behavioural change could not be compelled and highlighted the influence of starting stable relationships, the maturation process or achieving some measure of social stability such as finding stable accommodation.

“ I’ve had enough. I’ve done 29 years in prison. That’s like more time than Nelson Mandela and there’s not even any blood on my hands. All my crimes have been money motivated. I’m sick and tired of being hooked on crack. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Another man in England had found stable accommodation having lived on the streets:

“ It definitely isn’t about sanctions, or anything like that. Maybe because I’ve got older, or that I’m in a place now where I’m quite happy. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Some respondents were able to prevail upon family and friends in order to cope with the loss of benefits. However, the impoverishment of family and friends placed limits on this source of support. An English man described how he coped with losing JSA for six months:

“ I had to scrimp, save, flipping borrow and beg, everything just to survive basically. I didn’t really like asking my nan or any other of my friends because they’re all in the same predicament as me, Jobcentre or Income Support or whatever they were on. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

An English man complained:

“ It forced me to lend money to tide myself over off family and friends, but obviously they’re going through a similar situation themselves. Like my dad’s got cancer and they’re stopping his money, it’s just ridiculous. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Deep-seated drug and alcohol problems meant that many were estranged from family members.

“ I’ve got no-one I can ask for help, all my family basically are here, there and everywhere and hardly speak to me because I’m the black sheep of the family. ”

(WSU, offender, female, Scotland)

Some resorted to visiting food banks, soup kitchens or begging. However, others resisted the social stigma associated with this activity:

“ I’m a proud man, I hate sponging. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Another highlighted the danger associated with some venues:

“ I didn’t like using these places because it’s full of drug addicts, alcoholics, they’re fighting and stabbing each other. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Many reported that they had engaged in survival crime to cope with the loss of benefits:

“ I’d go into shops and steal whatever just to make do basically. And I used to rig my meter when I had my house. ”

(WSU, offender, female, Scotland)

However, it is difficult to disentangle survival crime from wider patterns of criminal behaviour which may be unrelated to sanctioning. It is salient to note that:

It is salient to note that one English woman reported:

“ I was shoplifting because we had no money. Otherwise we wouldn’t have had any food or anything. And because we had a drug habit as well. ”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

The engagement of some in criminal activities was reported to be the reason why some individuals were unconcerned about receiving multiple sanctions.

“ I need my money, but some people don’t care. They will take that £56 because they’ve got other things on the backburner, yes; they don’t give a fuck about the Jobcentre money, that’s there to keep it all going. So they would get sanctioned every week, they don’t give a shit, do you know what I mean. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

The inability of many to find employment that provided a route to a better life was emblematic. Furthermore, social networks largely comprising criminals and those on the fringes of society meant that criminal opportunities were often easier to access and more lucrative – albeit more risky.

A Scottish man had left his home city to progress his recovery from drug addiction but was quickly confronted with a moral dilemma on his return.

“ I was three, four hours in [city]. I was offered a bag of heroin and about 5,000 acid tabs. There you go, get an earner. Pay me back when you’ve got the money. Easy. ”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

Consequently, a few had not claimed benefits for several years.

“ Why mess about down there, because I’m earning a couple of hundred pounds every day, why wait down there for an hour or maybe more? Then I’ve got to wait two weeks for the money. I’d jump in my mate’s car and have a quicker earner, you know. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

A combination of low benefit levels, increased surveillance and sanctioning of claimants, and some involvement in criminal enterprises may lead some offenders to disengage more readily from the benefits system. An English man who had incurred several sanctions:

“ When you’re at rock bottom, you get kicked when you’re down. That’s what it feels like. You feel like giving up... ‘I’m not going to get any money. I’m not going to get any help. I can’t be bothered with it [claiming benefits]’. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

“ Some people haven’t claimed I know for years because they just don’t think that they’re going to get anything. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

“ I just gave it up [the benefit claim] and didn’t bother with it again. Carried on just going out every day thieving. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Views on ethics

There was widespread support for tying benefit entitlement to behavioural conditions, especially for those claiming JSA. Some acknowledged that this represented a change:

“ People aren’t just going to be allowed to sit around on their arse collecting dole money any more, they are going have to get up and do things. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

However, the purpose of conditional welfare was primarily seen as vehicle for disentitlement and cutting government expenditure rather than fostering positive behavioural change.

“ I think it is a way of manipulating the numbers and making things look as though they’re not really. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

There was widespread support for sanctioning those deemed not to be taking their responsibilities seriously, or ‘taking the piss’. A reluctance to do what was required of them was felt to be more pronounced in certain groups. Those on ‘the sick’ and drug addicts were frequently mentioned in this context (ironically sometimes by existing addicts).

“ You always see smackheads around and shit they always seem to have the money. All my mates are looking for work, and they can’t get any work, they’re being sanctioned all the fucking time. ”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Nevertheless, some felt that the authorities were too ready to impose sanctions without exploring the cause. Some of those with mental health problems were often unable to meet appointments. Others reported incurring benefit sanctions shortly after release from prison, which was likened to an additional punishment.

“Criminals have done their punishment in jail, so I don’t believe they need more punishment when they come out.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

A number of objections were made to sanctioning:

- Sanctions were now too harsh:

“How can you justify not giving somebody money to live for weeks and months on end? What are you meant to do?”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

- It is morally wrong to deprive individuals of their livelihoods. These individuals frequently drew our attention to wider inequalities and the privileged social position of policy makers.

“It’s all right sanctioning people, you might think it’s right on your high horse, but you come down to the grass roots and you’ll see people are suffering. There’s one parent families, young girls who haven’t any money, they’ve got babies in prams and they’ve got to feed them.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

- Sanctioning was likened to punishment or bullying.

“I think the benefit system, they do tend to scare and threaten people, and I don’t like that.”

(WSU, offender, male, Scotland)

“No, you don’t attack the most vulnerable, the most needy in society.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

- Sanctions can undermine the process of recovery:

“I mean they might be on a recovery path and that sanction could probably put them

back down, back to square one again, or further back.”

(WSU, offender, female, England)

- A few highlighted the problem of stigmatisation. Sanctions unfairly ‘tarred everybody with the same brush’.

- Some felt that it was unfair to use sanctions because this drove people into crime.

“That’s what they eat and if they get sanctioned, they have nothing to eat. So, in essence, you’re either going to make the person starve or you’re going to force them to do something illegal, to ensure they can eat.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

“It’s going to get to the point where they’ve got that many people on sanctions people are going to start getting clubbed on the back of the head after they’ve put numbers in the cashpoint.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Those interviewed had perfectly ordinary future aspirations. A man in England wanted:

“just to be happy and healthy... just maybe get a partner or something like that.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Another individual reported:

“My main thing is to remain drug-free.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

However, some individuals were acutely aware of their parlous situation:

“I could go one way or the other, I could be literally dead, or doing a long time in prison, or it could be I’ve paid off my debts and I’ve got a little business set up.”

(WSU, offender, male, England)

Further research

These offenders will be interviewed again for our research in 2015-16 and then for a third time in 2016-17. This will enable the research to capture the dynamics of change for these individuals and the role of sanctions and support within this. It will also enable a better understanding of the medium-term cumulative outcomes of interventions and the impacts of new legislation and mechanisms of sanctions and support that are currently being introduced.

Further Information

This paper was written by Prof Del Roy Fletcher from Sheffield Hallam University. It is one of a

set of nine presenting our first wave findings on different policy areas. An overview paper sets out our findings in summary.

Further information about the project may be found at: <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/>
A briefing paper on the policy context and existing research evidence on offenders may be accessed at: <http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/publications/>

For further information about our findings, please contact communications officer Janis Bright at janis.bright@york.ac.uk

Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change is a major five-year programme of research funded under the Economic and Social Research Council's Centres and Large Grants Scheme. The project aims to create an international and interdisciplinary focal point for social science research on welfare conditionality and brings together teams of researchers working in six English and Scottish Universities.

