



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Social Security in Scotland: first wave findings welfare conditionality: sanctions, support and behaviour change

Laphroaig Theatre IET Glasgow, 9 June 2016

#glas16



An ESRC large grant



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 31 policy stakeholders policymakers/actors
2. 7 focus groups with frontline welfare practitioners who implement policy
3. Three rounds of repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews with a diverse sample of 134 welfare recipients who are subject to welfare conditionality

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

- **Exploring welfare conditionality across a range of policy domains and groups**
 - Jobseeker's Allowance claimants
 - lone parents
 - disabled people
 - Universal Credit recipients (in and out of work)
 - those subject to antisocial behaviour orders/family intervention projects
 - offenders
 - migrants
 - (homeless people and social tenants)

- **Locations in Scotland**

Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness



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Universal Credit: first wave findings Scotland

Dr Sharon Wright, University of Glasgow



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Universal Credit: sanctions

- Experienced negatively
- Logic of encouraging job search undermined when recipients keen to find work and taking appropriate action but sanctioned in ways they found unjustified or disproportionate

*‘They rearranged the time of my appointment, phoned me and told me, and I said ‘Right, that’s fine.’ And then they went and changed it back to the original appointment and they didn’t tell me. So I missed my appointment by a day... I lost half my month’s money for that.’
UC recipient, male)*

- Financial, material, emotional and health impacts overwhelmingly negative

Universal Credit: support

- Range of experiences of JCP, WP and Universal Jobmatch
- Claimant Commitment and 35 hour job search:

'Unrealistic. Very unrealistic. It's too much. It's too much for anybody (Universal Credit recipient, male)

- Phone line very costly and digital requirements presented challenges for some:

'I live 25 miles outside town... and I don't have internet access or anything. I don't even have phone boxes. Well it's an hour there and an hour back so it's two hours a day.' (Universal Credit recipient, male)

- Confusion over whether volunteering counts as job search:

'We had a guy who was wanting to do conservation work... he really wanted to do this. It was only six weeks or something, maybe a bit longer. Because it was five days a week he couldn't have done it. But he was almost guaranteed a job at the end of it. But the Jobcentre said 'no'.' (FG3, Universal Credit)

Counterproductive conditionality

‘That’s quite hard because then you need to get another job so that people, they feel good that they’ve got a part-time job so that’s one step and they’re doing quite well. But then they’re really pushed to get another job and this could be people with kids.’ (FG3, Universal Credit, Scotland)

- In-work Universal Credit interviewees did not think they should be subject to the same sanctions as out-of-work claimants
- In-work conditionality could be counterproductive and introduce new disincentives to work
- Mismatch between flexibility required by employers and rigidity of JCP appointments
- Imbalance between weight of sanctions and absence of in-work support



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Disability and conditionality: first wave findings Scotland

Professor Peter Dwyer, University of York



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Welfare Reform Act (2007): Employment and Support Allowance

- **ESA extended behavioural conditionality to disabled people for first time**

Work Capability Assessment

- **Support group** – ‘limited capability for work related activity’, no conditionality
 - **Work Related Activity Group** – mandatory work preparation requirements
 - **Fit for Work** – Jobseeker’s Allowance, full conditionality
-
- **Scottish sample of disabled people**
- 19 disabled people with a diverse range of physical, mental and sensory impairments
 - 10 men and 9 women, interviewed in Edinburgh and Glasgow

The Work Capability Assessment

- **Overwhelmingly critical of WCA**

There didn't seem to be any comprehension of what having particular disabilities is like, or how that experience feels on the inside, or the fact that you might actually be trying to be compliant. (Disabled woman)

- **Mental health issues not understood/taken seriously**

The depression was much more disabling than any physical illness I've had. I think I was two years out of hospital after a suicide attempt, went to the medical and they still managed to score me zero points. (Disabled man)

- **Exacerbated disabled people's impairments**

At the end of it [husband] had been planning to go back to work and I was simply going to get a taxi home. And he said, 'I can't, you're in such a state I can't...' [He] took me back and put me to bed for the day. I was in such pain, psychologically, spiritually even I suppose, and physically that he put me to bed for the day and worked at home for the next couple of days. (Disabled woman)



Support

- **Practical support into work limited**

Never been a two-way process, it's always been this is what's going to happen, this is how you have to behave, this is what needs to get done and if you don't, we threaten you with this. (Disabled man)

I mean I was seeing this guy [name]. As a person I got on with him quite well. As an adviser I thought he was bloody useless. (Disabled man).

I've been to a couple of their workshops but they were very basic and I just don't find them very helpful. (Disabled man)

- **Some examples of good practice**

I heard about Disability Employment Advisers and that was my lifeline... there should be more DEA officers... since more people with disabilities are being forced to find work. (Disabled woman)

Sanctions

- **Sanctions had adverse effects on people's financial ability to meet their needs and health and well-being**

Well, it put me in debt! So, it depressed me. I never ate so many beans and pasta in my life... that's when I went £500 in arrears with my rent. (Disabled man)

- **The threat of sanctions caused anxiety, distress and anger**

It is demeaning, condescending, it is painful, it is damaging, it actually makes your disabilities worse... And it is completely unproductive. It doesn't get people work. Nothing in what they've done to me has assisted me in getting back in to the employment market. So these people are paid to torture me basically, for money I don't get. (Disabled woman)

Conditionality and behaviour change: enabling disabled people into work?

- **Some (v.) limited evidence of conditionality moving disabled people nearer/ into work**

Confidence kicked in then, or maybe I had become more reconciled to the fact that this was what I was doing. I don't know, but something changed, and it was psychological; something shifted. So I started making my own changes on my own CV, I started writing my own cover letters instead of waiting for somebody to do it for me... But without [Work Programme's] help. Because to be quite honest with you, if I was doing this at home I would have been in one hell of a mess. (Disabled woman)

- **The right support not sanctions is vital**

Things need to be individualised. People should have individual programmes to help them to achieve what they feel that they can achieve, not what the government tells you you've got to achieve. (Disabled woman)



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First Wave Findings: Jobseekers in Scotland

Dr Alasdair B.R. Stewart, University of Glasgow



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Background

- View shared by successive governments of need to tackle ‘welfare dependency’.
- Increased requirements for claimants, with sanctions for failure to comply, seen as solution.
 - Monitoring of job search activities
 - Welfare-to-work schemes
 - Mandatory work placements
- Criticism of this approach, however, as ineffective & punitive.

The Scottish Jobseekers Sample

- 26 participants sampled as a jobseeker within Scotland.
- 8 (31%) had experienced one or more benefit sanctions.
- 14 (54%) male and 12 (46%) female.
- 10 (38%) had a disability, with mental health issues and addictions being most common.

Age	<18	18-24	25-49	50-64
Jobseekers	6	3	10	7

Experiences of conditionality

While some participants felt they were able to meet their jobsearch requirements without issue, there was a prevailing sense that the level of conditionality had increased.

It's getting a lot harder & a lot stricter now. It's just little mistakes & you're getting punished. Jobseeker, male.

Similarly, the blanket nature of conditionality made participants feel no recognition was given of their efforts.

[The advisors are] looking at you like [...] they're trying to weigh you up to see if you really do want to work. Honestly it makes you feel they're downgrading you ... it makes you feel like you've never worked in your life. They don't know anything about me ... you're just a number to them. Jobseeker, male.

A few felt that how strictly conditionality was applied depended upon the adviser they saw.

Support

Complaints about removal of 'Job Points' and little or no IT access.

The Jobcentre's got computer things, they're asking me to go, but they've not got the staff to give me the support. Jobseeker, male.

Lack of support from advisors at Jobcentre Plus. Feeling that Jobcentre Plus advisers were there to punitively enforce conditionality, and little else.

A lot of [advisers] just kind of pass you on, you know, 'You applied for 15 jobs this fortnight, right, that's good enough, go away', and that's you for another two weeks. Then you've got the other ones where you're not doing enough, or they don't feel you're doing enough, and they try and put you back on the same courses you've been on, & you're not getting the support & help you need to get any work. You feel as if you're just going in a circle, wasting your time doing job searches. Jobseeker, male.

Work Programme & Mandatory Courses

Those with no IT experience or who had become unemployed for first time in years found aspects of the mandatory courses helpful. For others it was felt that being referred was another way to monitor them or give appearance of providing support.

I think it's just basically that there's not enough stuff that they're putting forward, it's just always like, here's a computer, do your job search, make sure your CV's up-to-date, and then that's you, you just keep applying for the stuff you would do in your normal house, so it's not much different.
Jobseeker, male.

A few even if they felt the course was not helpful to them viewed the staff positively, especially in comparison to the Jobcentre.

I've got to know the people now, it's quite a good laugh as well as the serious side. The people are really helpful & they do treat you with respect ... They do say 'How are you getting on? How is that going?' They show an interest in you. Jobseeker, male.

Sanctions

4 sanctioned 1 time, 3 sanctioned 2-5 times, 1 sanctioned more than 5 times.

Reasons for being sanctioned included failing to meet jobsearch requirements, being late, and missing appointments.

Most felt that their sanction had been applied unfairly – particularly when sanctions were applied unexpected.

[My daughter] had cancer & I always went to appointments ... with her. I was late for an appointment ... I said I was at a [medical appointment]. They said well your daughter turned 18 three weeks ago, she's alright to go herself ...
Jobseeker, female.

Impact of Sanctions

Financial impact of sanctions led many into debt, putting potential strain on relationships with friends & family. Having to ask for help seen as degrading. Further emotional impact in terms of anxiety at how they would survive.

Oh, I felt horrible because I had to sort of rely on them, do you know what I mean? Rely on their generosity and it wasn't a good feeling
Jobseeker, male.

Fear of sanctions – at times seen as something that was hard to avoid happening.

On the day, a bit of anxiety in ways, like when you're going in you're just kind of hoping you've got enough that you've put down, that they're not going to pull you up for something stupid, which it usually is, and you can kind of get it and say, right, at least I've got that two weeks over and done with.
Jobseeker, female.

Behaviour Change?

While some participants reported that the sanctions system made them more vigilant when jobsearching, for a few this became a hypervigilance to conditionality.

Well I always try to make sure ... I'm up in plenty of time to get there. I usually get there about 15 minutes early. Jobseeker, male.

Most felt being sanctioned, or threatened with one, did not impact their behaviour as they were already committed towards finding work.

It's not in my mind to change your behaviour. My behaviour has always been to actively try and find ... a job & if I can't find a job realistically that I can get to, what pays for me to do that job? Jobseeker, male.

Ethicality

Broad acceptance of principle of reciprocity and those able to work should be looking for work in exchange for benefits. However, the current conditionality and sanctions system seen as overly severe and too quick in taking punitive action.

I worked for three years straight. I did my bit and everything... It's not fair for me to be going to the Jobcentre every time and feeling embarrassed and going in and just feeling horrible, because you do because it's a horrible place. So it's not fair because I've worked do you know what I mean?
Jobseeker, female.

Work Programme seen as acceptable only where there was a clear benefit to the claimant. Mandatory work placements in exchange for benefits seen as unfair and open to exploitation by employers.

Because I'm not going to work for nothing, do you know what I mean? Why should I go and stack shelves, do you know what I mean? From like eight in the morning till five at night?... And somebody else is doing it & they're getting paid and I'm not. Jobseeker, male.



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Lone Parents

Prof Sarah Johnsen (Heriot-Watt University)



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Key Policy Developments

- Increased expectations re work activation and reduction in child(ren)'s age thresholds
 - Work Focussed Interviews (WFIs)
 - Lone Parent Obligations (LPOs)
- Lone Parent Flexibilities

Implementation and Experiences of Welfare Conditionality



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Premises Underpinning Increased Conditionality

- Misguided; founded on poor understanding of reasons underpinning low levels of LP participation in paid work
- Insufficient account taken of personal factors / structural obstacles

Lone Parent Flexibilities

- Poorly understood and/or insufficiently implemented by Jobcentre staff
- Majority of LPs unaware that flexibilities exist
- Variation in account taken of caring responsibilities

Provision of Support

- Balance of sanctions and support inappropriately weighted toward former
- Support offered generally insufficient to overcome barriers to work

“There was never anyone who sat and looked at my qualifications or who gave me any advice. I thought it should be a place that's supposed to help you to find work and I never received any help to find work...” (Lone parent, female, Scotland)

Sanctions: Causes

- Many result from DWP admin/communication errors
- Many caused by failures of comprehension *cf.* deliberate non-compliance

“I didn't even know about sanctions - I didn't even know about benefits, to be honest, a wee book to fill out, whatever, and I went up one day and she says I hadn't done something on this book and she sanctioned me. I didn't even know what she was talking about.” (Lone parent, female, Scotland)

Sanctions: Impacts

- Caused significant financial hardship
- Adverse outcomes for physical and/or mental health of LPs and their children

“[My gas and electric] fell into that much arrears... I was without heating for ages... I pawned everything I had... You're literally going, ‘Do I eat or do I have light?’” (Lone parent, female, Scotland)

Work-Related Outcomes

- Weak financial gains associated with the jobs typically acquired
- Concern given that majority of children living in poverty are in 'working' households

“The jobs I would be looking for... [are] minimum wage. So for the financial side of things the benefits would be pennies, and if I was having to travel to work, that would be probably swallowed up in travel costs, you know, so!” (Lone parent, male, Scotland)

Views re Whether / When Welfare Conditionality is Justified



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Critiquing Arguments Put Forward to Justify Welfare Conditionality

- **Paternalistic:** *‘Paid work is good for LPs and their children’*
 - Widespread recognition re benefits of paid work
 - But, justification has little traction given:
 - a) negative impacts of sanctions on already poor families (esp. ‘innocent’ third parties); and
 - b) limited evidence that LPs actually helped to gain/maintain work sufficient to improve material wellbeing
- **Contractualistic:** *‘LPs have a duty to prepare for/seek work’*
 - General consensus that basic premise re making a societal contribution is reasonable
 - But, object to failure to recognise caregiving as legitimate citizenship obligation

Concluding Reflections

- Split in opinion re whether there is a role for WC in promoting LPs' participation in paid work
- Present system based on misguided assumptions and poorly equipped to overcome barriers to work
- At best, current practice fails to support LPs in ways intended; at worst, it can compound their disadvantage
- Widespread call for a more 'constructive', support-focussed, approach



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Poverty Truth Commission videos

- Life on benefits: <https://vimeo.com/126248985>
- Sanctions: <https://vimeo.com/123110273>



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Tea and coffee break



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**CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP**
IN SCOTLAND

Welfare conditionality findings

CPAG response on implications
for new social security powers

09/06/16



Welfare conditionality findings: implications for new social security powers?

- Initial observations
- Nature and limitations of new powers
- Implications for new powers
- Wider implications: what can be done in Scotland?

CPAG: initial observations

- Findings resonate with our Early Warning System evidence
- Balance of rights and conditions, support and sanction – clearly out of kilter
- Conditionality and sanctions too often undermining devolved policy and services seeking to improve children's wellbeing

New social security powers

- Disability and carers benefits
 - including DLA/PIP/AA and carers allowance
- Discretionary payments and top-ups
 - discretionary housing payments
 - **top-ups to any reserved benefit**
- Universal credit powers
 - vary housing element for renters, payment arrangements
- Regulated social fund: incl. maternity grants
- **Employability programmes:** inc. work programme
- Power to create **new benefits**
- Around 15% of total Scottish benefit expenditure
- **Conditionality and sanctions remain reserved**

How could new powers be used to protect people from adverse impacts of conditionality?

- Employability powers – reduce ‘mandated’ tasks, ensure tasks appropriate, improve communication with DWP
- ‘Top up’ powers – prioritise benefits not subject to conditionality
- New social security agency – a whole new culture? ‘Dignity’, ‘investment’ ‘respect’ ‘don’t stigmatise’ ‘integral to a fair society’ – can it help shift attitudes to ‘welfare’?
- New benefits – must learn from this research
- Maximise support in devolved benefits –help protect from risk of reserved benefit conditionality

Wider implications: what can be done in Scotland?

- Advice and advocacy – maintain investment
- Preventing sanctions – understanding conditions
- Build relationships with DWP – influence delivery and culture – identify and promote what's working
- Evidence and inform – DWP policy and delivery
- Proof policy and services – are they:
 - aware of risks & reasons clients facing income crisis?
 - thinking about impact on nature of service needed, and demand
 - helping to maximise incomes, reduce costs, remove barriers to services?
 - considering as part of wider planning e.g. in Children's Services Plans?



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Inclusion Scotland



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Open discussion



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Thank you

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