



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

From welfare to work? Exploring the effectiveness of welfare conditionality

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Overview

- 1. Very brief overview of welfare conditionality in UK social security system**
- 2. International evidence re effectiveness of WC in promoting paid work**
- 3. Four case studies from WelCond QL panel study about how WC works**
- 4. Conclusions**

Welfare conditionality in the UK Social Security system

■ A principle of welfare conditionality in UK SS system

Makes continued receipt of social security benefits contingent on individual claimants' engagement with mandatory, work focused interviews (WFIs), training support schemes and/or job search requirements, with failure to undertake such specified activities leading to benefit sanctions (Dwyer, 2016).

■ Conditions of 'conduct'/behaviour

Conditionality embodies the principle that aspects of state support, usually financial or practical, are dependent on citizens meeting certain conditions which are invariably behavioural (DWP, 2008 :1)

■ Understanding welfare conditionality

'Carrots' (mandatory support) and 'Sticks' (sanctions) e.g. Gregg, (2008)

'Amorphous' (behaving responsibly) – 'concrete' (tightly specified) conditionality (Paz-Fuchs, 2008)

■ Universal Credit – in work conditionality

Moving people off welfare into work and 'progression' in work

Extending benefit sanctions and compulsory work search to low paid workers for first time

Advocates

- ❑ Passive unconditional benefits promote welfare dependency
- ❑ Welfare conditionality provides the answer to idleness/irresponsibility
- ❑ Instrumental use of 'carrots' and 'sticks' promote positive behaviour change e.g. move people into/closer to paid work
- ❑ Ethically justifiable, enabling and effective

Adversaries

- ❑ Conditionality exacerbates poverty and social exclusion
- ❑ Flawed assumptions re causes and solutions to 'welfare dependency'
- ❑ A rationality mistake: people unable or unwilling change behaviour / enter paid work
- ❑ Ethically unjustifiable, punitive and ineffective

International evidence re the effectiveness of WC

- **Evidence based policy?**

For more and more claimants, benefit entitlement is going to be dependant on satisfying work related conditions. Where that leaves the concept of a right to benefit is a matter for speculation. The impact on claimant attitude and behaviour is yet to become fully apparent (Treolar, 2001 :3).

Gulf between the rhetoric of welfare reform and the evidence ... Policy makers continue to justify the extension of sanctions (and sanction backed conditionality), on moral philosophy grounds whilst taking an ambivalent attitude to evidence (Griggs and Evans, 2010 :4).

- **Strict sanctions backed regimes work as intended**

E.g. Abbring et al. 2005; Lalive et al. 2005; Brockmann et al. 2014

- **Sanctions are ineffective and counterproductive**

E.g. Arni et al. 2013; Watts et al. 2014; Wu et al. 2014; Loopstra et al. 2015; NAO, 2016; PAC, 2017; Dwyer, 2018.

- **Evidence that sanctions backed welfare conditionality is effective in increasing sustained engagement with the PLM is *at best* limited**

Case study 1: 'Joy' supported into paid work

*Compulsory. I didn't have a choice... but I was like, 'I already know English. I come here every single Thursday and I think I've executed whatever you've required of me. So for you to doubt that I know English'... [subsequently] 'You have to attend the two eight week courses. And, if you don't we will sanction you, so it's compulsory, Monday to Friday, 9:30 to 3pm'. So that's like a full-time job when it's on. **(Joy wave a)***

*[Jobcentre] referred me to [WP provider] ... they have a larger database when it comes to employers... they help me with positions that I wasn't aware of... I was never under pressure like at the Jobcentre... I felt really comfortable not just with the organisation but with the individual that I was allocated to assist me... February, I had an interview ... I got the job... So excited... 35 hours per week and a permanent position... I passed my probation in three months so I'm now full-time and permanently employed. It's been going great. **(Joy wave b)***

*Being signed up with that organisation was a blessing in disguise... initially, I just thought, oh, Jobcentre's just trying to get rid of me... I felt listened to, I felt assisted... in my journey to get a job, and yet the sanctions were a total opposite, so definitely the support was much appreciated, was more useful... It got me the job, at the end of the day. **(Joy wave c)***

Case study 2: 'Harry', multiple sanctions and disengagement

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I'm homeless, living on the street... I was on income support, then they decided I wasn't sick or whatever so they took me off income support, put me on jobseekers. Then that all went wrong and I got sanctioned and then I got made homeless... I couldn't pay the rent because I was sanctioned... you can actually claim housing benefit without jobseekers, but then no-one tells you that. So then my rent ended up backing up and because my head was all over the place I just couldn't deal with it...

*Made me go to a Work Programme... You go in, they give you a nice sales pitch about all the wonderful things they're going to do and then say 'Right, off you go, go find a job' and that's it basically it... I got sanctioned because I missed appointments with them. **(Harry, wave a)***

I don't claim benefits at the moment. I just don't want to know. Too much of an headache. You know, you never know from one week to the next whether you're getting paid and it's just proper stress... it's pointless. 'Do it. If you don't, you're sanctioned.'... I don't sign on anymore... The only thing it has done is make it more difficult basically. They say, like, it encourages people to go to look for work. No, it doesn't...

*Quite lucky sometimes. I get my breakfast at [homeless charity]. I work here all day and lunch here... The only place you get any kind of help are charities. Everywhere else is a waste of time... [Doing voluntary work] it's just helping my state of mind really more than anything. **(Harry, wave b)***

Case study 3: John, discretion and sanction and support

I got made redundant and I started to dabble... doing a few things that maybe I shouldn't have to make a bit of money and to be honest it was quite exciting and it sort of all snowballed...

*[Of the Jobcentre adviser] After I'd lost everything I had to then sign on again. My adviser this time was absolutely fantastic. I couldn't praise him up enough... I explained my situation. I said 'look I'm a drug addict and I'm doing my best to get clean. I'm in recovery' and he was just really supportive. He wasn't on my case. He was encouraging; brilliant... He hasn't just let me get away with it. He's been 'What about this training course? Go for that...' He could have sanctioned me on numerous occasions. **(John wave a)***

*[Of the homelessness organisation] Before I came here all I was interested in was drugs... I was at rock bottom, I had no family, no friends, I had nothing apart from the clothes on my back. I can honestly say that this place [homelessness support organisation] saved my life... That's no exaggeration it's really just turned my life around completely. **(John wave b)***

*I was sat there for 20 minutes. Now, by the time somebody come and got my card, the woman she said, 'You're late', I said, 'Well, no, I'm not, I was downstairs 15 minutes early, the guys wouldn't let me up and when I come upstairs, nobody took my card.' She said, 'Well, I don't believe you.' I said, 'Well, come and ask the security guards.' She said, 'No, I'm sanctioning you.' **(John wave c)***

Case study 4: 'Joan' in-work conditionality, stasis or progression?

*She wants me to work 30 hours... So, she just advised me to look. I mean they don't pressure me, she's very good... Then the next minute somebody phoned me from the job club... 'Yes, I'll be coming' [laughs]. So, that's what they said, 'As long as you look, try to look for work', but she knows my problems with my health and that. So, they seem quite happy, yes... She's more like a friend really... because she's a similar age to me, so it's nice [laughs]. **(Joan Wave a)***

*That horrible lady said that if I didn't sort things out she was going to sanction me, but she didn't, you see. But she put down that it was a warning of a sanction... She spoke down to me as if I was a child... with not being well with this, as well, has not helped, because I've been all over the show with it. But I've not stopped work. I'm still working. **(Joan, Wave b)***

*You have to keep going, and if you don't go of course you get in trouble but I always go. I never let them down... she said that I'm supposed do 40 hours. I tried to explain...at my age I really wanted to slow down a little bit... One job... she sent it to me on my email thing, but when I explained to her I had a job, I still had the job at night. I work half past 4 to 6, and she said this was 5 until 12 at night. I said 12 at night, I can't - can you imagine at midnight? I mean it's bad enough in the morning but midnight?... It was quite a good walk from here. She said it's walking distance. **(Joan wave c)***

Conclusions

- Welfare conditionality within the UK social security system is largely ineffective in facilitating people's entry into, or progression within, the paid labour market over time.
- Stasis is the most common outcome
- Sustained movements into work over time are evidenced but are rare and exceptional
- Sanctions are punitive they do not enhance engagement with the PLM
- Sanctions backed welfare conditionality leads to disengagement from the benefit system for many – a positive or negative outcome?
- Much, though not all, of the mandatory support and training on offer is of poor quality and largely ineffective in promoting movements from welfare into work
- Providing appropriate support *not sanctioning* is the key to changing peoples lives (Dwyer and Bright, 2016)
- The Big Question: what kind of welfare system do we want?