



From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
for Work and Pensions

Miss Anne Begg,
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Fifth Delegated Legislation Committee,
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Dear Anne,

JOBSEEKER'S ALLOWANCE (LONE PARENTS) (AVAILABILITY FOR WORK) REGULATIONS 2010

During the Committee's debate of the draft Statutory Instrument on 23 February I promised to write about two questions I was unable to respond to fully immediately. The two questions concerned statistics about lone parents receiving Jobseekers Allowance and couples "living apart together" while receiving benefits.

Statistics about lone parents receiving JSA

Members asked for statistics concerning the Lone Parent Obligations changes introduced in November 2008 and the experience of lone parents receiving Jobseeker's Allowance. The specific questions are addressed below:

1. *How many parents have moved from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance as a result of Lone Parent Obligations since November 2008?*

The Department for Work and Pensions does not publish statistics on the movement of customers between different benefits. However, we made a number of planning assumptions which were published in the impact assessment. It was estimated that the following numbers of lone parents would move from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance as a result of the Lone Parent Obligations:

- 49,000 lone parents moved under Phase 1 (from November 2008);
- 45,000 lone parents will move under Phase 2 (from October 2009);
- 60,000 lone parents will move under Phase 3 (from October 2010)

2. *How many of the lone parents who have moved from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance have found a job?*

Around 15,350 lone parents on JSA have moved into work since the Lone Parents Obligations were introduced. However, it is not possible to identify the proportion of those lone parents who were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance as a result of Lone Parent Obligations and those who claimed the benefit directly.

3. *The number and proportion of parents in the same group who were moving from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance before Lone Parent Obligations were introduced – in order to compare how many lone parents who have moved onto Jobseeker's Allowance from Income Support due to Lone Parent Obligations have found a job compared to those in receipt of Income Support before Lone Parent Obligations was introduced and found work.*

The Department does not collect these data. However, we do expect that a number of lone parents will have moved into work whilst in receipt of Income Support. These jobs may have been gained in the period prior to Lone Parent Obligations but may nevertheless have been a consequence of Lone Parent Obligations. The evaluation of Lone Parent Obligations is examining this possibility.

4. *How many lone parents have been sanctioned under Jobseeker's Allowance since November 2008 and how many become eligible for hardship payments?*

Since Lone Parent Obligations were introduced about 900 lone parents on Jobseeker's Allowance have been sanctioned. All lone parents are eligible for hardship payments as they are part of the 'vulnerable' group of customers who have immediate access.

5. *How many times have good cause and just cause been found and the lone parent not sanctioned?*

Since Lone Parent Obligations was introduced there have been 2,660 sanction referrals for lone parents on Jobseeker's Allowance in which a decision was made not to impose sanction.

6. *Figures on the number of lone parents making use of the flexibility which allows them to be deemed available for work in the school holidays if suitable alternative childcare is not available.*

These data are not collated centrally; however, the evaluation of Lone Parent Obligations will include information on this. The early findings from the evaluation are due to be published at the end of March 2010.

Living Apart Together

The Right Honourable Member for Don Valley asked what the Department is doing to address the issue of customers who are 'living apart together'. She is concerned about the situation where some lone parents receiving benefits may be in a relationship and the family is also receiving income from that source.

I would like to assure the Committee that the Department takes this form of abuse seriously and all suspected cases are considered fully by the Fraud Investigation Service. If the Department receives an allegation of this nature it would be treated as fraud and investigated under the 'Living Together as Husband and Wife (or Civil Partners)' category or as 'undeclared income'. "Living Together" is the largest value of fraud lost in working age means-tested benefit. Jobcentre Plus is therefore targeting this group actively. The Department uses data matching with two Credit Reference Agencies to identify potential "Living Together" cases in Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Housing Benefit where the customer has failed to declare a partner in the household. It can also extend to cases of fictitious separation in different households where the evidence warrants it. This data matching can highlight where the suspected partner has declared financial links to the customer's address and can lead to further fraud investigations.

I hope this letter answers the points raised during the debate. I am copying this letter to all the Committee's members and the Library.

Yours,

Will

Helen Goodman MP