

promoting access to White Rose research papers



Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/>

This is an author produced version of a paper published in **Ethics and Social Welfare**.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
<http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/77472>

Published paper

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) *Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?* *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 2 (7). 124 – 140.

*This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:
Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140*

Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: Necessary, just, effective?

Dr Adam Whitworth and Dr Julia Griggs

Author Biographies

Dr Adam Whitworth is a lecturer in the Department for Geography, University of Sheffield, UK, specialising in the spatial analysis of social policy, particular issues of welfare-to-work reform, work and well-being and linkages between inequality and crime.

Since 2012 Dr Julia Griggs is a researcher at the National Centre for Social Research where she works on a wide range of social policy issues. Prior to this she worked at the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford, researching around fathering, grandparenting and sanctions.

*This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:
Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140*

Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: Necessary, just, effective?

Adam Whitworth¹ & Julia Griggs²

Abstract

Since the 1990s OECD nations have witnessed a rapid expansion in the use of conditionality within welfare to work programmes in the shift towards 'activating' welfare regimes. This trend raises a number of interrelated normative and empirical questions which we crystallise in the dimensions of necessity, justice and effectiveness. Lone parents in the UK make an instructive case study within which to assess these issues given that they have experienced wholesale change in the work expectations and demands placed upon them since the late 1990s. This article traces the evolution and justificatory 'policy stories' behind these reforms as well as evidence around their employment, income and well-being outcomes for lone parents. It concludes that it is extremely difficult to reconcile the research evidence with the persistent and strengthening policy claims of both New Labour and Coalition governments that current welfare to work conditionality for lone parents is necessary, just or effective.

Keywords: welfare reform, lone parents, welfare to work, conditionality, fair reciprocity, paternalism

Introduction

The increased policy focus on employment activation via welfare to work (WTW) policies underpinned by the greater use of work-related conditionality attached to social assistance benefits has been pervasive across the OECD nations. Due to their comparatively high poverty rates and, in several countries, comparatively low employment rates lone parents have received particular attention within this broader trend (Finn and Gloster 2010, p.2) and the evolution of the UK's WTW policies towards lone parents make an interesting case study within which to explore normatively these wider comparative policy trends.

Historically lone parents have held an awkward position within the UK's male breadwinner model which has struggled to incorporate them beyond the dichotomous roles of either 'carer' or 'worker'. This tension has become increasingly apparent as the UK, along with all other OECD nations, has moved towards an adult worker model in which all adults are expected to be 'citizen-workers' by default irrespective of their care needs (Lewis 2001). Within this context, sanction-backed work requirements for UK lone parents have been gradually but radically transformed since the late 1990s, in part a reaction to the UK's relatively light conditionality regime compared to other OECD nations prior to that point (Finn and Gloster 2010). This shift sits within a UK policy context in which paid work has been consistently presented by all governments of the past decade as their 'best route out of poverty' (DWP 2005; DWP 2008; DWP and DfE 2011) and central to achieving the government's ambitious target to eradicate child poverty by 2020.

This article assesses whether this ratcheting up of conditionality attached to lone parents' receipt of social assistance benefits over that period can be considered necessary, just and/or effective. To do

¹ Dept of Geography, University of Sheffield

² National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), London

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124- 140

so the evolution of the policies and their justificatory stories are traced before the behavioural assumptions and logical necessity of the reforms are questioned. In section three both normative and empirical material are woven together through Stuart White's framework of 'fair reciprocity' to evaluate whether the reforms can be considered morally just and/or pragmatically effective around key employment, income and well-being outcomes. In the final section a heuristic framework for understanding the changes is presented along with an assessment that there is little reason to consider the current conditionality regime for lone parents as necessary, just or effective.

Lone parent welfare to work reforms since 1997: shifting stories of 'creeping conditionality' (Dwyer 2004)

Deacon (2004) outlines three alternative ideological justifications of conditionality – contractualism, paternalism and mutualism – and of these it is paternalism and contractualism which have dominated justifications for conditionality in welfare to work policies. To simplify, paternalists maintain that conditionality is justifiable because it is argued to support paid work and paid work is said to be beneficial. For contractualists, however, conditionality is argued to be justifiable because it is fair in terms of limiting 'free-riding' by requiring everyone to contribute to society via paid work wherever possible.

Whilst welfare to work conditionality has become increasingly commonplace internationally such policies are of course highly diverse in nature, encompassing a continuum of different types and intensities of potential interventions of which at least three distinct levels can be identified:

- A first level of conditionality which mandates a Work Focussed Interview (WFIs), but no following actions;
- A second level which mandates a WFI plus some work-related activities, but with the transition to paid work remaining voluntary;
- A third level within which active attempts to seek paid work also becomes a mandatory requirement of continued eligibility for social assistance.

New Labour's policy intentions on coming to office in 1997 were clear from the outset through their almost immediate abolition of the Lone Parent Premium on Income Support, the group's main out-of-work social assistance benefit. Nevertheless in terms of WTW conditionality the early New Labour years were a time of incremental inroads into comparatively light work-related conditionality regime at that time. The support side of the welfare contract changed first with the introduction of the New Deal for Lone Parents which offered lone parent Income Support claimants access to Jobcentre based employment support on a voluntary basis (although around 70% of those lone mothers who received the invitation letter from DWP believed the programme to be compulsory (Hales et al. 2000, p.134)). Paid work was portrayed by New Labour as beneficial both financially and non-financially (DSS 1999) and the introduction of mandatory work-focussed interviews (WFIs) in 2001 to lone parents on Income Support with a youngest child aged five or above was justified paternalistically in terms of ensuring awareness of employment opportunities and benefits so as to support lone parents to "concentrate on *their* longer term goals" (DWP 2005, p.96; author's emphasis). Mandatory WFIs were gradually extended to additional lone parents based on the age of their youngest child and their type of claim (i.e. new or repeat) such that by April 2004 all lone parents in receipt of Income Support had to attend WFIs. Over time these WFIs also became more intensive – primarily through the incorporation of mandatory Action Plans after 2005 – and more frequent, developments again justified paternalistically in terms of extending the beneficial reach of employment information and awareness for lone parents (DSS 1999; DWP 2005).

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:
Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), pp124-140

Then in 2007 radical plans were signalled that challenged "existing assumptions about who – and at what point – someone should be in work" (Hutton 2007), with lone parents a clear focus for government. Around this time New Labour commissioned two important independent reviews of the benefits system, one from investment banker David Freud (later Baron Freud and the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government's Minister for Welfare Reform) and one from Paul Gregg, then a professor of economics in the UK. Together the 2007 Freud Review, DWP's 2007 *In work, Better off* Green Paper and the 2008 Gregg Review mark a critical development in the expansion of conditionality by proposing that lone parents be transferred from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance based on the age of their youngest child and, as a consequence, that they be required to attend mandatory fortnightly interviews at Jobcentre Plus offices and to actively seek an immediate move into paid work to remain eligible for social assistance. This transfer took place gradually with lone parents with a youngest child aged 12 or above transferred from Income Support to Jobseekers Allowance from November 2008 followed by those with a youngest child aged 10 or above from October 2009 and those with a youngest child aged seven and above from October 2010 (DWP 2008).

In part these expansions continued to be justified paternalistically. Gregg (2008) for example argues that enhanced conditionality was needed because "more and more families were failing to enjoy the financial and non-financial benefits of paid employment" (Gregg 2008, p. 10) and Freud (2007) argues similarly that conditionality has been shown to boost employment outcomes and that "work is generally good for physical and mental well-being", evidence cited repeatedly through the Freud report drawn from research commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (see Waddell and Burton, 2006). But these documents also mark a growing place for contractualist justifications of heightened conditionality in response to improved supports around childcare, employment flexibility and individualised employment advice. DWP (2007) talks explicitly of a "new social contract with lone parents" (DWP 2007, p. 10) in which "the offer of increased help would be balanced with the responsibility of individuals to make the best use of that support or face a loss of benefit" (DWP 2007, p. 14). These are sentiments broadly shared by Gregg (2008, p. 49) and Freud (2007, p. 91) although both place greater weight than does DWP (2007) on the need for *adequate* rather than simply *improved* supports (as was most commonly argued under New Labour) within the contractualist justification for increased conditionality.

New Labour recognized the need for such supports for lone parents and assurances were made that continued policy investments would take place in personalised assistance and advice services, childcare, and incentives to 'make work pay'. In addition, a range of exemptions³ from the standard requirements of Jobseeker's Allowance were created for lone parents to enable them to restrict their work availability due to their caring responsibilities (e.g. being available for work only within school hours or to refuse jobs where no childcare is available). Despite these assurances and exemptions the proposals attracted considerable criticism including an official response from the Social Security Advisory Committee which recommended that the government not proceed with reforms (Kennedy 2010). Whilst "acknowledging these concerns" (DWP 2011a, p. 7) and having "carefully considered" (Kennedy 2010, p. 9) their arguments the government proceeded without change.

³ For further details see Gingerbread (2012)

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140

The UK general election of 2010 saw the arrival of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government but this shift in political leadership has largely produced a story of consistency and continuity although some significant reforms have been made. Most direct perhaps was the announcement that the transfer of lone parents from Income Support to Jobseeker's Allowance would be extended to lone parents with a youngest child aged five or six from May 2012. In addition, the introduction of Universal Credit from 2013 will bring together most existing social assistance programmes, and may benefit lone parents through its greater financial rewards for 'mini jobs' of fewer than sixteen hours per week both through reduced average marginal withdrawal rates and new access to childcare subsidies. The consolidation of existing employment activation programmes into the Work Programme from July 2011 may also affect lone parents, though it is as yet unclear precisely how. The Work Programme is an innovative welfare to work programme in that it is delivered by complex supply chains of private and, to a far lesser extent, voluntary sub-contractors who operate flexibly within a 'black box' delivery model and whose payments depend largely upon moving the unemployed into jobs lasting at least six months. The financial model of the Work Programme offers opportunities for more intensive and personalised support as well as risks that provision – particularly for those farthest from the labour market – may be of poor quality and/or infrequent, with some early evidence sadly pointing more to the latter than to the former (PAC 2012; BBC 2011; BBC 2012).

Notable shifts in the justificatory discourses underpinning welfare to work conditionality can also be seen within key Coalition policy documents (DWP 2010a; DWP 2010b). First, although the Coalition continue to talk paternalistically of the stated "clear rewards to taking all types of work" (DWP 2010a, p. 18) there is a shift in emphasis towards contractualist justifications of conditionality, suggesting perhaps that well-being may be less of a focus in terms of welfare to work outcomes. Second, this contractualism is no longer justified in terms of adequate or even increased support but simply in terms of "the support they receive" (DWP 2010a, p. 6, 28; author's emphasis) – support of unqualified level or change and suggesting that *any* level of support is now considered appropriate to legitimize enhanced work-related conditionality. Finally, the nature of the contract under focus has also shifted under the Coalition such that documents move between contractualism as a balance between obligations and employment supports (of whatever level) (DWP 2010a, p. 6, 28) and as a balance between benefit recipients and taxpayers (DWP 2010a, p. 6, 18). Although raised previously in Gregg (2008, p. 10) this latter balance with taxpayers appears to have taken a more central position in the Coalition's contractualist discourse. The implicit suggestion is to drive a wedge between taxpayers and benefit recipients, a clearly erroneous distinction given that benefit recipients are also taxpayers in a range of ways (e.g. indirect taxation).

Conditionality in lone parent welfare to work policies: A necessary policy lever?

Whatever the justification, however, conditionality is at its heart an inherently behaviouralistic policy response (Deacon 2004) in being considered necessary to 'correct' behavioural 'problems' argued to be driving worklessness. A range of behaviouralistic discourses have been used by New Labour and the Lib-Con Coalition who since 2010 have talked explicitly about the role of "negative behaviours" (DWP 2010a, p. 8) and the need for greater conditionality to "promote responsibility and positive behaviour" (DWP 2010a, p. 18), stating the need to reform a welfare system "that has too often undermined work and the aspiration that goes with it" (DWP 2010b, p. 1).

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140

Such claims however have been critiqued due both to the partiality and inconsistency of behaviourally loaded terms such as 'dependency' (Goodin 2002; Fitzpatrick 2005) as well as for their weak evidential foundations. Research has shown repeatedly that long-term social assistance recipients do not vary from the 'mainstream' population in terms of their values, aspirations or beliefs (Walker and Howard 2000; Wright 2011), all 'problems' which are either explicitly or implicitly claimed within the behaviouralistic discourse. Moreover, whilst Coalition policy documents assert a need to use conditionality to instil a "culture of work in households where it may have been absent for generations" (DWP 2010b, p. 3) the government's own statistics show that even in a single generation (i.e. ignoring the claim that this is an intergenerational issue) only 1.7% of households contain adults without any collective work history (DWP 2011b).

Focussing on UK lone parents specifically, DWP's (2011a) own equality impact assessment of the extension of conditionality to lone parents with younger children states that 80% of this group are either in work, looking for work or would like to work. Yet despite behavioural causal factors not seeming relevant for the majority of these lone parents conditionality continues to be presented as the necessary policy response. This is in contrast with research evidence which instead identifies how personal (e.g. health, weak skills and work experience), family (e.g. multiple children and complex care needs) and structural (e.g. childcare costs, limited job availability) obstacles affect work outcomes (Gingerbread 2010; Haux 2012).

Who cares if it's necessary? Conditionality is fair and it works

Even if welfare to work conditionality does not seem necessary for lone parents as a counter to behavioural 'problems' it is perhaps still possible to argue that the policy approach might nevertheless be considered acceptable (if not fiscally efficient) so long as it is morally just and/or effective in terms of playing a non-trivial role in supporting key outcomes (defined here as employment, income and well-being).

These two evaluative criteria (moral justness and effectiveness in achieving key outcomes) map onto the two justificatory discourses outlined above (contractualism and paternalism) and whilst appearing to be distinct issues – one seemingly normative and the other empirical – in practice the two strands can most sensibly be considered together. This is particularly true given that the dominant framework within which the moral justness of welfare to work conditionality is discussed – Stuart White's account of 'fair reciprocity' (White 2000; 2003) – incorporates paternalistic considerations about the real-life nature and consequences of conditionality into its normative evaluative framework.

In brief, White's notion of 'fair reciprocity' argues that welfare to work conditionality is not necessarily just or unjust but rather that the moral justness of such policies depends upon the precise nature of the conditionality at play, the contextual 'background distribution' within which the conditionality sits as well as the nature of resulting outcomes. White (2000; 2003) sets out four evaluative dimensions of 'fair reciprocity' against which to evaluate the moral justness of WTW conditionality:

- fair opportunity – the ability to have a reasonable degree of input into the nature of the mandated activities and to have a reasonable chance of being able to fulfil those activities;
- fair reward – the receipt of a reasonable share of the social product for the fulfilment of one's required contributions;

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140

- universal application – for them to be fair all citizens must be required to fulfil the mandated activities;
- diversity in valued contributions – there must be recognition of alternative forms of valuable contributions and 'acceptable' activities.

The discussion which follows adopts White's framework as its organisational structure, weaving together the relevant normative and empirical issues to address the interrelated questions of whether these lone parent reforms can be considered morally just and/or effective in terms of key welfare outcomes.

Fair opportunity

White claims that if an expectation of paid work is placed on lone parents then they must have a reasonable opportunity to engage in meaningful work over which they have a degree of choice. Focussing on this issue of agency, Fitzpatrick (2005) argues for a 'principle of democratic consent' in which individuals face an *abstract* meta-duty to contribute to the social good but which individuals have a *prior* right to input into via the design of the *precise* duties flowing from it. Yet this democratic agency is absent from the current proposals in which decision-making power is loaded asymmetrically onto government officials and Work Programme providers rather than onto benefit recipients (Griggs and Bennett 2009).

There are also questions over how realistic the current work expectations actually are for many lone parents. Whilst the reforms focus on boosting the effective labour supply critics have sought to refocus attention instead on issues of inadequate labour demand and extreme competition for any vacancies, a more severe problem in some local areas than others but in general more problematic during the current economic downturn (Theodore 2007). Gingerbread's (2010) research finds that only a minority of advertised jobs are 'care compatible' part-time or job-share and virtually none are school-time and term-time only. Nevertheless the cost-benefit model for lone parent employment within the Freud Review assumes 23 hours of employment a week with zero childcare costs (Freud 2007, p. 32), despite these modelled assumptions bearing little resemblance to the real world. Significant reforms have been implemented over the past decade to encourage flexible working – most notably the 'right to request' flexible working and the Part-Time Workers Regulations 2000 – but these do not appear to have transformed the 'care-friendly' employment landscape.

Childcare clearly remains a central issue to (lone) parents and whilst there have been dramatic improvements since the creation of the UK's first National Childcare Strategy in 1998 these issues remain far from resolved. Just over 20% of non-working lone parents cite childcare difficulties as their main barrier to employment (Hoxhallari et al. 2007), 60% of Family Information Services across Britain report availability problems (Daycare Trust 2011) and childcare in England remains amongst the most expensive in Europe (OECD 2010). The reduction in the childcare subsidy within Working Tax Credit as of April 2011 from 80% to 70%⁴ did little to improve this situation, although proposals within the upcoming Universal Credit at least expand eligibility to this childcare subsidy.

A potential counter from government might draw upon the existence of the lone parent exemptions which, in contrast to other Jobseeker's Allowance claimants, provide lone parents with a range of legal grounds on which they can restrict their work availability (Gingerbread 2012a; DWP 2011a). But this is unsatisfactory for two reasons. Ethically this is to reverse the appropriate ordering of the fair

⁴ Up to a maximum level of £175 for a family with one child

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140

reciprocity bargain between government and lone parents, unjustly seeking to enforce obligations without government first ensuring an adequate enabling environment (though of course at this point the conditionality may not be needed at all). Moreover, although important the exemptions provide no guarantees about how they will be defined or implemented by frontline staff. There is evidence that sanctions are variably enforced across Jobcentre Plus staff, that their advice is inconsistent and at times incorrect and that it is the already most disadvantaged who are most likely to be sanctioned (Finn and Gloster 2010; Gingerbread 2010; Griggs and Evans 2010), a particular issue given the severity of sanctions introduced by the Coalition government. These problems can be expected to become more common as providers, caseloads and decision-points and service quality guarantees multiply and fragment in the Work Programme.

Fair reward

The criterion of fair reward argues that individuals should receive a decent share of the social product in return for their productive contributions and this is in many ways comparable to a test of the paternalistic claim that work 'pays' and can therefore be mandated on that basis. A logical starting point perhaps is to question why conditionality ought to be required at all if paid work were so clearly beneficial, assuming that lone parents want what is best for themselves and their children? Mead's classic paternalistic response argues that welfare recipients lack the 'competence' necessary to see that paid work is in their own interests and that the state is therefore acting benevolently in mandating work (Mead 1986). This argument, however, conflates 'rationality' (i.e. the ability to act in one's self-defined best interests) with the narrower idea of 'economic rationality' (i.e. the ability to act rationally so as to maximise economic returns) (Duncan and Edwards 1999). For (lone) parents, paid work and financial resources are two elements amongst a broader mix of factors – work, cash, care, time – which *together* represent the desired aim of 'good enough care' in a balance that varies over time and between individuals (Williams 2004). Tensions around work-family reconciliation clearly exist for working parents and these tensions are magnified for single parents (Dex, 2003), particularly in a UK context with weak availability of 'care friendly' employment and patchy and expensive childcare.

White and Cooke (2007) go on however to argue that a paternalistic justification for welfare to work conditionality *might* still be considered morally just *if* it can be convincingly proven both that paid work is without doubt beneficial and, secondly, *if* it is conditionality, as opposed to any other policy reform, that achieves those positive outcomes (Goodin 2002). Each of these claims is far from clear however.

Dealing first with the question of whether work necessarily pays, lone parents do state that their financial position when working is notably superior to when living on benefits (Millar and Ridge 2009) – in large part due to policies such as tax credits which aim to 'make work pay'. This appears, however, to be more a reflection of the low level of benefits than any degree of affluence when working: most poor children live with a working adult (Aldridge et al. 2011, p.44) and a third of transitions from social assistance to paid work fail to lift the household out of poverty (Wright 2011). Two thirds of single parents enter low paid work (Gingerbread 2012b), average wages for lone parents sit just above the National Minimum Wage (Freud 2007, p. 32), the financial gains from work tend to be small, in-work progression is generally limited and financial instability, debt and anxiety remain for most working lone parents (Millar and Ridge 2009). For lone parents, therefore, 21% of those working full-time and 27% working part-time remain poor (Gingerbread 2010). The shift to Universal Credit seeks to improve this situation – and the support for mini jobs and increased access to childcare subsidies is welcome – yet the stated benefits from Universal Credit are averages which

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140

will not apply to all household types, particularly once childcare costs and the interaction with increased personal tax allowances are factored in (Family Action 2010; Children's Society 2012; Gingerbread 2012c).

In terms of employment outcomes, evaluations of WTW programmes do generally find positive employment effects for lone parents (Finn and Gloster 2010). There are a range of factors, however, which make employment transitions difficult to sustain such that 70% of claims for Jobseeker's Allowance are repeat claims due to involuntary job loss (Wright 2011), with 20% of lone parents moving into work finding themselves back out of work within twelve months (Gingerbread 2012b). Harker (2006) notes that the UK would have met the 70% employment target for lone parents if all those lone parents who had moved into work over the past decade had retained their jobs, but recent UK attempts to enhance job retention within the Employment and Retention Advancement pilot for lone parents have proven disappointing (Riccio et al. 2009).

In terms of well-being, econometric studies generally find negative associations between unemployment and well-being (Dolan et al. 2008). However, it does not seem to follow that simply because policy has now redefined lone parents as 'unemployed' that this negative unemployment effect on well-being necessarily applies for lone parents who may continue to see themselves primarily as parents or carers. These are also average effects and do not disaggregate by type of employment. Rather than *any* work benefitting well-being – as Freud (2007) repeatedly implies and the Coalition government explicitly state (DWP 2010a, p. 18) – Waddell and Burton write more precisely that paid work enhances well-being provided that your job is “a good job” (Waddell and Burton 2006, p. 34) which you have been able to “choose and are happy with” (Waddell and Burton 2006, p. 10), though Freud (2007) neglects to mention these details. Given that working lone parents are concentrated in jobs that are relatively poorly paid, insecure and with weak prospects for progression it is not clear that 'good jobs' are necessarily what employed lone parents 'enjoy', particularly as enhanced conditionality weakens the voluntariness of lone parents' employment decisions.

However, robust evidence on the longer-term well-being impacts of conditionality-driven employment trajectories specifically is sparse given that virtually all evaluations focus on relatively short-term employment and/or income effects. Two studies are of particular relevance however. In a synthesis of the impact of sanctions Griggs and Evans (2010) summarize that the limited evidence available (which comes from the Swiss context) suggests that conditionality-driven employment transitions are associated with longer-term *dis*benefits in terms of reduced employment quality, weaker employment stability and lower earnings levels than would otherwise be the case. Secondly, Gregg et al. (2009) focus on lone parents in the UK specifically and find mixed but generally modest positive well-being gains from the New Deal for Lone Parents employment programme of that time. These analyses are based on early 2000s data however and so relate to the much lighter conditionality regime of that era. Given that one would expect greater well-being gains from voluntarily chosen employment one would expect any well-being effects from today's tougher conditionality regime to be smaller and, as with the evidence cited above, quite possibly negative.

Secondly, however, the normative argument for conditionality rests not only on clearly proving the existence of positive outcomes for lone parents from such employment programmes but also on demonstrating that any such positive outcomes are caused by conditionality itself rather than any other factors. This distinction between *outcomes* and *impacts* of conditionality is frequently confused however, in part due to methodological difficulties in separating out the independent

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140

effects of the various factors and in part due to inappropriate conflation of the impacts of these various factors into a single 'conditionality effect' within key reports (Freud 2007, p. 30; Gregg 2008, p. 49). However, those UK and US evaluations which have disaggregated such effects find that tax credits account for the largest share of the overall employment effects seen (around one third) whilst the general economic conditions and welfare reform (including but not limited to conditionality) each account for a further quarter of the effects (Cebulla et al. 2008; Grogger and Karoly 2005). Hence, conditionality itself seems to play a relatively minor role in driving the employment outcomes seen, outcomes which themselves remain problematic in terms of potential longer-term *dis*benefits, issues of sustainability, as well as low pay and continued poverty in work.

Universality

White's third criteria of fair reciprocity – universality – relates to the idea that any demands for productive contributions must be applied evenly across all individuals if they are to be considered fair. But the question of universality of the application of conditionality is also of relevance to paternalistic justifications given that if work is asserted to be beneficial then in order to be logically consistent why ought non-working middle classes, or those living off the income of their partners, be denied this benevolent conditionality (Goodin 2002; White 2003; Fitzpatrick 2005)? Arguments that such individuals *are* making reasonable contributions – perhaps in the form of unpaid care or paying tax (indirect consumption taxes for example) – surely do not hold, for non-working lone parents also contribute in these ways.

Secondly, however, there is also a question of the universality of the understanding of 'benefits' within the policy approach in that the 'benefits' of living in UK society have been reduced down only to *social assistance* benefits. This however neglects various other 'benefits' which also require taxpayer support – hospitals, schools, roads, refuse collection, criminal justice services, and so on – and it is unclear why these different forms of benefits, and the related obligations attached to such 'benefits', are treated by policymakers as so distinct from social assistance.

Diversity

Diversity, White's final criterion of fair reciprocity, concerns the need to treat fairly alternative forms of productive contribution, an argument which for lone parents focuses on unpaid care work. The feminist argument for the (re)valuation of unpaid care work is by now well-known. At the macro-level, childrearing and care represent fundamental contributions to the social good – "socially necessary labour" (Anderson 2004) – as well as 'freeing up' others for the labour market. As such it is unclear why unpaid care is considered a less important social contribution when compared with paid work (White 2003; Williams 2004). At the micro-level, research on the ethic of care (Williams 2004) and on gendered moral rationalities (Duncan and Edwards 1999) highlights the importance of care to people's desires and well-being, as well as to their normative construction of what it means to be a 'good' parent. Consequently, a conditionality regime premised on the argument that paid work enhances well-being irrespective of its impacts on one's ability to deliver 'good enough care' (Williams 2004) is highly partial.

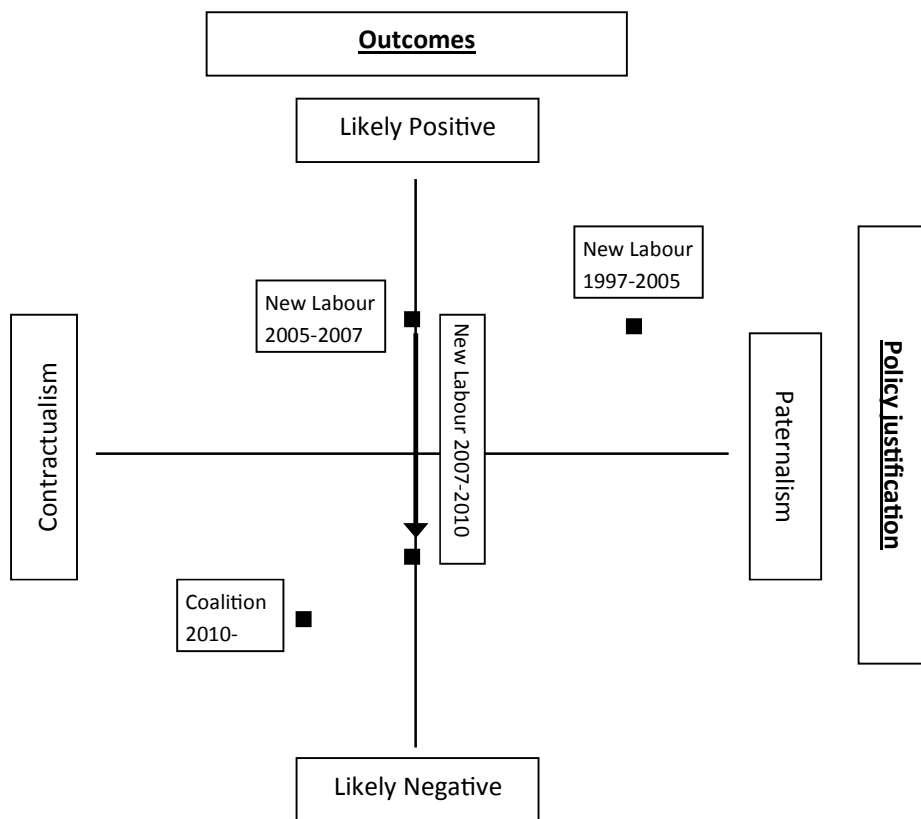
Discussion

Considering the past fifteen years as a whole, Figure One seeks summarises the radical shifts which have taken place in welfare to work conditionality for lone parents through a simple heuristic map of the changes across two key dimensions. Though based on the logic and evidence discussed above the framework cannot claim to be precise in terms of the detailed positioning of the policies at

*This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:
Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124- 140*

different time points. Rather, its aim is to assist the broader understanding of the policy evolution and implications of the trends.

Fig 1: Heuristic map of shifts in UK welfare to work conditionality for lone parents since 1997



Shifts in the justificatory framework are shown across the horizontal axis and relate to the shifting aims and emphases of the WTW regime for UK lone parents over time. It highlights the gradual transition from a paternalistically-led policy discourse under New Labour between 1997 and 2005 through to a more mixed account of both paternalism and contractualism towards the end of the New Labour period, and to the dominance of (different types of) contractualist discourses under the current Lib-Con Coalition government.

Across the vertical axis a holistic qualitative assessment of the expected employment, income and well-being outcomes is presented. In broad terms this suggests a gradual worsening of the outcomes expected from the reforms, which relates in significant part to the impact of the various escalations in conditionality during this period. In the early New Labour period, although WFIs became mandatory the decision as to whether to enter into paid work, or even into work-related activities, rested with lone parents' own evaluations of whether paid work would be in their own and their children's best interests. The addition of mandatory action plans from 2005 added an extra level of conditionality, but lone parents continued to retain ultimate agency over their employment decisions. A worsening of outcomes could be expected after 2007, however, as increasing numbers of lone parents became mandated to move directly into paid work, a decision which presumably had not previously been considered in their household's best interests (or else they would already be

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124- 140

working). The result is a gradual worsening of expected outcomes for lone parents between 2007 and 2010 as increasing numbers of lone parents were transferred to the Jobseeker's Allowance regime – depicted in Figure One by the downwards arrow along the vertical axis (given the relative balance between paternalism and contractualism at this time). Indeed, a holistic consideration of the likely income, employment and well-being impacts of the reforms for lone parents over this 2007 to 2010 period suggests a shift towards expecting negative rather than positive outcomes. Under the Coalition the de-emphasis of the paternalistic discourse and of the adequacy of policy supports, combined with the increasing size and duration of sanctions, suggest further worsening in expected outcomes for lone parents as well as a shift towards both weakened and more diverse contractualist justificatory stories.

The title of the article, however, focuses on whether the conditionality regime currently in place can be said to meet the criteria of necessity, justness and/or effectiveness which, at various times and in various ways, are presented by policymakers to justify the current approach. In terms of necessity first of all, the premise (whether explicit or implicit) inherent within any conditionality approach is that it is behavioural 'problems' which are driving lone parents' worklessness. Yet evidence casts serious doubts upon the typically unsubstantiated behaviouralistic assertions of both New Labour and Coalition governments and points rather to a range of personal, household and structural factors as forming the bulk of the causal story. A refocusing of policy attention on supporting lone parents to navigate *around* these barriers, rather than seeking via conditionality to force them *through* these obstacles, is urgently needed.

In terms of justness and effectiveness, for a range of reasons it is extremely difficult to see how this decade-long progression towards ever stronger conditionality can be described either as morally just or as likely to be effective in supporting lone parents to achieve beneficial income, employment or well-being outcomes. In particular, logical and objective consideration of the evidence raises several issues which seriously question the fairness and effectiveness of the current policy regime: the lack of agency for lone parents within the process; the devaluation of unpaid care as a productive contribution to society; weak financial gains to paid work; weak employment progression and sustainability; and questionable, and quite possibly negative, impacts on well-being. This is clearly not to argue that lone parents ought not to be supported to move into paid work and to realise their aspirations around work and care, quite the contrary. Rather, it is to argue that policymakers interested in the morality and/or pragmatic effectiveness of their policy approach to supporting lone parent employment, income and well-being need to engage seriously with the logical consistency and empirical validity of their claims and their policies. It is only by doing so that lone parents will be able to properly enjoy the ability to realise their aspirations to build a better life for themselves and their children.

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:
Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), pp124-140

References

Aldridge, H., Parekh, A., MacInnes, T. and Kenway, P. (2011) *Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Anderson, E. (2004) 'Welfare, Work Requirements and Dependant-Care', *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 21(3):243-256.

BBC (2011) 'The Work Programme', *The Report*. Broadcast on Radio 4, 15th September 2011. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/r4report/all>

BBC (2012) 'The Work Programme revisited', *The Report*. Broadcast on Radio 4, 29th March 2012. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/r4report/all>

Cebulla, A., Flore, G. and Greenberg, D. (2008) *The New Deal for Lone Parents, lone parent Work Focused Interviews and Working Families Tax Credit: a review of impacts*, Research Report No 484. London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Children's Society (2012) *The Parent Trap: childcare cuts under Universal Credit*. London: Children's Society

Daycare Trust (2011), *Childcare costs in 2011*, London: Daycare Trust.

Deacon, A. (2004), Justifying conditionality: the case of anti-social tenants, *Housing Studies*, 19, 6: 911-926.

Department for Social Security (1999), *Opportunity for All: Tackling Poverty and Social Exclusion*, Norwich: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Department for Work and Pensions (2005), *Opportunity for All: Seventh Annual Report 2005*, Norwich: Her Majesty's Stationary Office.

Department for Work and Pensions (2007) *Ready for Work: Full employment in our generation*, Cm 7290, Norwich: HMSO.

Department for Work and Pensions (2008) *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future*, Cm 7506, London: The Stationery Office

Department for Work and Pensions (2010a) *21st Century Welfare*, Cm 7913, Norwich: HMSO.

Department for Work and Pensions (2010b) *Universal Credit: Welfare that works*, Cm 7957. Norwich: HMSO.

Department for Work and Pensions (2011a), *Lone parent obligation extension project: equality impact assessment*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Department for Work and Pensions (2011b), *Ad hoc analysis of individuals living in households who have never worked*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:
Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), pp124-140

Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education (2011) *A new approach to child poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives*, Cm 8061, London: HMSO

Dex, S. (2003), *Families and work in the twenty-first century*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Dolan, P., Peasgood, T. and White, M. (2008), Do we really know what makes us happy? A review of the economic literature on the factors associated with subjective well-being, *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 29: 94-122.

Duncan, S. and Edwards, R. (1999) *Lone Mothers, Paid Work and Gendered Moral Rationalities*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Dwyer, P. (2004) 'Creeping Conditionality in the UK: From welfare rights to conditional entitlements?' *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 29(2):265-287.

Family Action (2010) *The Universal Credit: marginal returns?* <http://www.family-action.org.uk/standard.aspx?id=12569> [accessed 2nd December 2011].

Finn, D. and Gloster, R. (2010) *Lone Parent Obligations: A review of recent evidence on the work-related requirements within the benefit systems of different countries*, Department for Work and Pensions Report No 632, London: Corporate Document Services.

Fitzpatrick, T. (2005) 'The fourth attempt to construct a politics of welfare obligations', *Policy and Politics*, 33(1):15-32.

Freud, D. (2007) *Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity: Options for the future of welfare to work*, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Gingerbread (2010) *Changing the Workplace: The missing piece of the jigsaw*, London: Gingerbread.

Gingerbread (2012a) *Single parents and Jobseeker's Allowance – special rules*, London: Gingerbread.

Gingerbread (2012b) *It's off to work we go?* London: Gingerbread.

Gingerbread (2012c) *Unintended consequences*, London: Gingerbread

Goodin, R. (2002) 'Structures of Mutual Obligation', *Journal of Social Policy*, 31(4):579-596.

Gregg, P. (2008) *Realising Potential: A vision for personalised conditionality and support – An independent report to the Department for Work and Pensions*, Norwich: HMSO.

Gregg, P., Harkness, S. and Smith, S. (2009), 'Welfare Reform and Lone Parents in the UK', *The Economic Journal*, 119: F38-F65.

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:

Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', Ethics and Social Welfare, 7(2), pp124-140

Griggs, J. and Bennett, F. (2009) *Rights and Responsibilities in the Social Security System*, Social Security Advisory Committee Occasional Paper No. 6, accessed Nov. 2009 at http://www.ssac.org.uk/pdf/occasional/Rights_Responsibilities_Social_Security.pdf

Griggs, J. and Evans, M. (2010) *Sanctions within Conditional Benefit Systems: A review of evidence*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Grogger, J. and Karoly, L. (2005) *Welfare Reform: Effects of a decade of change*, Harvard: University Press.

Hales, J., Lessof, C., Roth, W., Gloyer, M., Shaw, A., Millar, J., Barnes, M., Elias, P., Hasluck, C., McKnight, A. and Green, A. (2000) *Evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents: Early lessons from the Phase One prototype*, Department of Social Security, Research Report No. 108, London: Corporate Document Services.

Kennedy, S. (2010) *Lone Parents and Jobseekers Allowance*, House of Commons Library, Social Policy Section.

Haux, T. (2011), Activating Lone Parents: An evidence-based policy appraisal of welfare-to-work reform in Britain, *Social Policy and Society*, 11, 1: 1-14.

House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) (2012) *Department for Work and Pensions: the introduction of the Work Programme*. London: The Stationery Office

Hoxhallari, L, Connolly, A and Lyon, N (2007) *Families with Children in Britain: Findings from the 2005 Families and Children Survey*, Research Report No 424, Norwich: HMSO.

Hutton, J. (2007) Speech on *Building Sustainable Communities through Partnership: Eradicating child poverty*, 30 January 2007.

Lewis, J. (2001) 'The Decline of the Male Breadwinner Model: Implications for work and care', *Social Politics*, 8: 152-170

Mead, L. (1986) (ed.) *The New Paternalism: Supervisory approaches to poverty*, Washington: The Brookings Institute.

Millar, J. and Ridge, T. (2009) 'Relationships of Care: Working lone mothers, their children and employment sustainability', *Journal of Social Policy*, 38(1): 103-121.

OECD (2010) *Gender Brief*, Paris: OECD.

Riccio, J., Bewley, H., Campbell-Barr, V., Dorsett, R., Hamilton, G., Hoggart, L., Marsh, A., Miller, C., Ray, K. and Vegeris, S. (2009) *Implementation and Second-Year Impacts for Lone Parents in the UK ERA Demonstration*, Research Report No 489, London: Department for Work and Pensions.

Theodore, N. (2007), New Labour at work: long-term unemployment and the geography of opportunity, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 31: 927-939.

This is the final version of the article prior to journal formatting. To receive a copy of the published paper please contact the author directly. To reference this article please cite:
Whitworth, A and Griggs, J (2013) 'Lone parents and welfare-to-work conditionality: necessary, just effective?', *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 7(2), pp124- 140

Waddell, G. and Burton, A. (2006), *Is work good for your health and well-being?*, London: The Stationery Office.

Walker, R. with Howard, M. (2000), *The making of a welfare class? Benefit receipt in Britain*, Bristol: Policy Press.

White, S. (2000), Review article: Social rights and the social contract – Political theory and the new welfare politics, *British Journal of Political Science*, 30: 507-532.

White, S. (2003) *The Civic Minimum: On the rights and obligations of economic citizenship*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

White, S. and Cooke, G. (2007) 'Taking Responsibility: A fair welfare contract' in J. Bennett and G. Cooke (eds) *It's all about you: Citizen-centred welfare*, London: IPPR.

Williams, F. (2004) *Rethinking Families*. London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

Wright, S. (2011) 'Can Welfare Reform Work', *Poverty*, 139:5-8.