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Contents

List of Tables.....	iv
List of figures	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Conventions	vii
Glossary.....	viii
Executive Summary.....	1
Research Design	1
Characteristics of the Eligible Population	1
Employment Experience	2
Barriers to Work.....	2
Commitment to Work	3
Interest in Study, Training and NDLP Services	3
NDLP Participants and Non-Participants.....	3
1 Evaluating the New Deal for Lone Parents.....	5
1.1 The New Deal for Lone Parents	5
1.2 The Policy Context	6
1.3 Evaluating the Programme.....	10
1.3.1 The Characteristics of the New Deal For Lone Parents Eligible Population	11
1.3.2 Explaining Participation and Non-participation.....	11
1.3.3 Experiences of the New Deal for Lone Parents	11
1.3.4 The Effects of the New Deal for Lone Parents	11
1.4 Aims and Methods of the Quantitative Evaluation	12
1.4.1 Details of the Postal Survey.....	14
1.5 Coverage and Objectives of this Report.....	15
2 Characteristics of the Lone Parent Population	17
2.1 Age, Sex, Ethnicity and Employment Service Region.....	17
2.2 Age and Number of Children.....	20
2.3 Tenure, Car and Telephone	21
2.4 Academic and Technical Qualifications	24
2.5 Duration of Income Support Claim	25
2.6 NDLP Participants and Non-participants	27
3 Past Experience of Work.....	29
3.1 Who Had Worked in the Past.....	29
3.2 When Last Job Was Held	32
3.3 Time in Last Job.....	34
3.4 Childcare while Working.....	34
3.5 Conclusions about Past Work	35
4 Working Lone Parents.....	37
4.1 Number of Hours Worked per Week	37
4.2 Childcare Arrangements while Working	39
4.3 Conclusions	40
5 Non-Working Lone Parents.....	41
5.1 Current Activities	41
5.2 Job Search Activity and Hopes for Future Work.....	43
5.3 Conclusions	45
6 Attitudes and Barriers to Work and Training.....	47

6.1	Barriers to Work and Training	47
6.2	Wage Expectations as a Barrier to Work	55
6.3	Attitudes to Work, Childcare and Parental Responsibilities	56
6.4	Interest in Training	61
6.5	Conclusions	63
7	Interest in Support to Find Work or Training	65
7.1	Use of Services	65
7.2	Interest in Services.....	69
7.3	Conclusions	72
8	Participation in the New Deal For Lone Parents	73
8.1	Identifying Participants in the New Deal for Lone Parents	73
8.2	Key Characteristics of Participants and Non-participants	74
8.3	Other Factors Associated with Participation	76
9	Conclusions	81
9.1	The Postal Survey as Part of the Evaluation Strategy	81
9.2	What the Survey Reveals About the Lone Parent Population.....	81
9.3	Implications for the Likely Impact of the New Deal for Lone Parents.....	82
	Bibliography.....	85
	Appendix	87

List of Tables

Table 2.1.1	Sex of lone parents	17
Table 2.1.2	Age and sex of lone parents	18
Table 2.1.3	Ethnic group of lone parents	18
Table 2.1.4	Age profile of different ethnic groups	19
Table 2.1.5	Lone parent's age by Employment Service region	19
Table 2.2.1	Number of children under 18	20
Table 2.2.2	Age of youngest child	20
Table 2.3.1	Tenure of lone parents	21
Table 2.3.2	Tenure by lone parent's age	22
Table 2.3.3	Use of a home telephone	22
Table 2.3.4	Use of a home telephone by tenure	23
Table 2.3.5	Driving licence	23
Table 2.4.1	Academic qualifications	24
Table 2.4.2	Technical qualifications	24
Table 2.4.3	Whether or not has an academic or technical qualification	25
Table 2.5.1	Duration of Income Support Claim	26
Table 2.5.2	Duration of Income Support claim by sex of lone parent	26
Table 2.5.3	Duration of Income Support claim by lone parent's age	27
Table 2.6.1	Participants based on evaluation database up to May 2001	27
Table 3.1.1	Work experience by lone parent's age	29
Table 3.1.2	Work experience by sex of lone parents	30
Table 3.1.3	Work experience by whether or not lone parent has a qualification	30
Table 3.1.4	Work experience by approximate age at first child's birth	31
Table 3.1.5	Work experience by age of youngest child	31
Table 3.1.6	Work experience by lone parent's tenure	32
Table 3.1.7	Work experience by duration of claim	32
Table 3.2.1	Hours per week by timing of last job relative to Income Support claim	33
Table 3.3.1	Time in last job by duration of benefit claim	34
Table 3.4.1	Childcare arrangements by hours worked	34
Table 3.4.2	Childcare arrangements by hours worked	35
Table 4.1.1	Current working status by hours worked	37
Table 4.1.2	Hopes about work in next 12 months by work status	38
Table 4.1.3	Year in which current job started by work status	38
Table 4.1.4	Hours worked by when started current job	39
Table 4.2.1	Childcare arrangements by hours worked	39
Table 4.2.2	Childcare arrangements by hours worked	40
Table 5.1.1	Whether any work preparation activity by when hope to start job	41
Table 5.1.2	Current activity by when hope to start job	42
Table 5.1.3	When hope to start work by past work experience	43
Table 5.1.4	Hours of work preferred by when hope to start paid work	43
Table 5.2.1	Job search in last four weeks by when hope to start paid work	44
Table 5.2.2	Job search in last four weeks by when hope to start paid job	45
Table 6.1.1	Barriers to work by when hope to start job	49
Table 6.1.2	Number of barriers to work by current working status	51
Table 6.1.3	Barriers to work by current working status	51
Table 6.1.4	Number of barriers to work by when hope to start job	52
Table 6.1.5	Barriers to work by sex of lone parents	53
Table 6.1.6	Barriers to work by age of youngest child	54
Table 6.1.7	Perceived barriers to work by duration of Income Support claim	55
Table 6.2.1	Whether will work for the minimum wage by when hope to start job	55
Table 6.2.2	Whether will work for the minimum wage by work status	56
Table 6.3.1	"A person must have a job ..." by duration of Income Support claim	57
Table 6.3.2	Commitment-to-Work scale by current working status	58
Table 6.3.3	Commitment-to-work scale by when hope to start a job	59
Table 6.3.4	Commitment-to-work scale by sex of lone parents	59
Table 6.3.6	Commitment-to-work scale by ethnic group of lone parents	61
Table 6.4.1	Interest in training by when hopes to start work	61

Table 6.4.2	Interest in training by qualification of lone parent	62
Table 6.4.3	Interest in training by age of lone parent	62
Table 7.1.1	Services used in last three months by sex	66
Table 7.1.2	Services used in last three months by qualifications	67
Table 7.1.3	Services used in last three months by use of a home phone	68
Table 7.1.4	Services used in last three months by when hopes to work	69
Table 7.2.1	Types of support or advice wanted by sex	70
Table 7.2.2	Types of support or advice wanted by age of lone parent	70
Table 7.2.3	Types of support or advice wanted by qualifications	71
Table 7.2.4	Types of support or advice by when hopes to work	72
Table 8.1.1	Whether NDLP participants mention contact with an adviser	74
Table 8.2.1	Age of lone parent by participant status	75
Table 8.2.2	Ethnic group of lone parent by participant status	75
Table 8.2.3	Number of children by participant status	76
Table 8.2.4	Number of children under five by participant status	76
Table 8.3.1	Duration on Income Support by participant status	77
Table 8.3.2	Tenure by participant status	77
Table 8.3.3	Qualifications by participant status	78
Table 8.3.4	When hopes to start work by participant status	78
Table 8.3.5	Services used in last three months by participant status	79
Table 8.3.6	Interest in support or advice by participant status	79

List of figures

Figure 1	Selected Social Security Policy Initiatives Since 1988	9
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Conventions

In tables, percentages are calculated by column unless otherwise noted. By convention, a 0 is used where there are no cases at all and an asterisk (*) to signify less than 0.5 per cent. In almost all instances, percentages are rounded to one decimal place. Because of this, column percentages may not add to 100. In many cases the unweighted base is less than the total 42,273 respondents either because a subgroup of the sample has been selected or because of non-response to specific questions. Where the sum of percentages exceeds 100 per cent, this is because more than one answer could be given for some questions.

All tables are provided with weighted and unweighted bases. The weights adjust for the differential probability of selecting each individual and for the differences in response rates. Further details are provided in the technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming).

It should be noted that with a self-completion questionnaire it was inevitable that some respondents would not answer all questions. In spite of selecting a Yes/No format to encourage all respondents to give an answer, some of them did not tick either of these answers. It is likely that in most cases the absence of a tick could reasonably be interpreted as a 'No' answer; however, the approach adopted in this report has been usually to analyse those with valid answers. Any exceptions to this policy are noted in the text with a justification for the approach taken in specific contexts.

Glossary

ES	Employment Service
GMS	Generalised Matching Service
IS	Income Support
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDED	New Deal Evaluation Database
PSU	Primary Sampling Unit
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions

Executive Summary

The New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) is one element of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy. NDLP is a national voluntary programme aimed at encouraging and sustaining work among lone parents on Income Support. The key feature of the programme is a network of Personal Advisers who offer employment-related guidance through a series of interviews and contacts with participants.

The National Centre for Social Research was commissioned to conduct a quantitative assessment of NDLP. This report draws on postal survey data collected from over 42,000 lone parents. It provides insight into the characteristics and programme needs of eligible lone parents, as well as forming the basis for more extensive face-to-face interviews with NDLP participants and a matched sample of non-participants.

Research Design

In the first stage of the project a postal survey was sent to almost 70,000 lone parents on Income Support who were eligible to participate in NDLP. Over 42,000 questionnaires were returned, indicating a response rate of 64.4 per cent. The postal questionnaire was designed to identify key characteristics of the eligible population not available from administrative data.

When selecting the sample for the postal questionnaire, administrative records were checked to establish that individuals selected had not participated in NDLP. Later monitoring identified a subset of lone parents who had participated after returning the questionnaire. The report includes a preliminary comparison of these NDLP participants with non-participants. The next stage of the project will match the participants identified in the postal survey with a control sample of non-participants in order to measure the impact of NDLP.

Characteristics of the Eligible Population

Confirming what is already known from administrative data, most eligible lone parents who returned the postal questionnaire were women, in the middle age ranges, and white. Nearly half had only one child in their care. A similar proportion had a child under the age of five. In addition:

- The majority rent their accommodation, usually from the local authority or housing association
- A significant proportion do not have a telephone at home, and this is particularly true among social renters
- A majority lack a full driving license
- Half report no academic or technical qualifications
- Over half have been on Income Support for two or more years.

These factors suggest that the capacity to find work is low for many lone parents.

Employment Experience

Only one in ten lone parents on Income Support were working at the time of the survey. They tended to be women, those with qualifications, and homeowners or those with a mortgage. This group had relatively brief spells on Income Support.

The majority of lone parents on benefit – nearly three in four – were not working at the time of the survey but had some prior experience of work. A third wished to start work within a year, but 40 per cent did not anticipate working in the next three years.

Another 18 per cent of the eligible population reported no work experience at all. A lack of qualifications and accommodation in social housing proved to be strongly associated with never having worked. In addition, those who had never worked tended to be:

- Women
- Lone parents in the younger age bands
- Those who were younger at the time of their first child's birth
- Those who had longer spells on Income Support.

Barriers to Work

An array of barriers to work were cited by lone parents on Income Support. Health-related factors were least commonly cited, though they may be more persistent as barriers to work. Barriers more widely cited include those pertaining to childcare, the perceived availability of work, perceptions about employers and pay, and low levels of skill or confidence. It is barriers such as these that NDLP is designed to address.

Many lone parents who were presently working faced a number of barriers, indicating that some lone parents manage to work in spite of these difficulties. However, the barriers they cited differed in important ways from lone parents who had never worked. Those presently working were less likely to cite:

- A lack of confidence or skills
- Worry about leaving their child with someone else
- Worry that employers wouldn't hire them due to their childcare responsibilities
- A health condition or disability.

Wage expectations may act as an additional barrier to work. Nearly two-thirds of the lone parents queried indicated they would not be willing to work at the minimum wage, although the percentage was lower among those lone parents currently working.

Commitment to Work

A set of nine attitudinal statements gauged attitudes toward work. They included such notions as “*A person must have a job to feel a full member of society*” and “*If I didn’t like a job, I’d pack it in...*” Based on a summary analysis of responses to these statements, overall ‘commitment to work’ was assessed. Commitment to work was especially high among:

- Lone parents who were currently working
- Those who intend to work in the near future
- Black lone parents.

Those who face multiple barriers and demonstrate lower levels of commitment to work are less likely to be selected in the next stage of research, since they are unlikely to be programme participants or closely matched to them on key characteristics. As such, the postal survey data can continue to be exploited for insight into the circumstances of all eligible lone parents.

Interest in Study, Training and NDLP Services

A small minority of eligible lone parents were engaged in study or training at the time of the postal survey. An additional group – nearly half of the sample – expressed interest in starting a course within the next three years. Those hoping to start a paid job in the near future were especially interested.

A quarter of eligible lone parents expressed interest in one or more of the specific services offered by NDLP. There was little variation in interest among the services tested. Only ‘help in trying out a job’ was less popular. Those professing greater interest in the services offered by NDLP tended to be:

- Younger
- Interested in starting a job in the next six months to a year
- Those with academic and/or technical qualifications.

Lack of interest in NDLP services was especially prevalent among older lone parents, those who felt that work was not an option in the next three years, and lone parents who lack qualifications.

NDLP Participants and Non-Participants

Because some of the postal survey respondents participated in NDLP after returning their questionnaire, a preliminary analysis is available comparing participants to non-participants. There was little variation in programme participation based on age and ethnicity, although participants tended to:

- Have fewer children
- Have had briefer spells on Income Support
- Hold some qualifications
- Anticipate working in the near future.

The next stage of the survey will match these participants identified in the postal survey with closely-matched non-participants. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted among each group from October 2001. A comparison of outcomes among participants and non-participants in the New Deal for Lone Parents will be used to judge the programme's effects.

1 Evaluating the New Deal for Lone Parents

This report provides interim research findings which will contribute to the evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents. This introduction provides background information about the New Deal for Lone Parents (Section 1.1) and its policy context (Section 1.2). The programme of research has been designed to evaluate processes and impacts, and is subsequently described (Section 1.3). The aims of the quantitative research described in the rest of this report are also specified. Finally the research methods are outlined (Section 1.4),¹ as well as the structure of the remaining sections of the report (Section 1.5).

1.1 The New Deal for Lone Parents

The New Deal for Lone Parents is one element of the Government's Welfare to Work strategy, which aims to encourage and sustain work among specific groups that are perceived as having some disadvantage in the labour market.

NDLP is a voluntary programme whose objectives are:

- to help and encourage lone parents on Income Support to improve their prospects and living standards by taking up or increasing hours of paid work
- to improve the job readiness of lone parents on Income Support to increase their employment opportunities.

The programme is delivered by Personal Advisers who offer support, advice and guidance through a series of interviews or contacts. The Personal Adviser is the key feature of NDLP. He or she offers an integrated service of advice and guidance to:

- provide support and guidance to clients who are job ready to search for work
- encourage and motivate all lone parents to identify their skills and develop confidence
- identify and provide access to education or training to increase job readiness, including access to Employment Service programmes
- improve awareness and knowledge of benefits
- improve awareness of routes into education and training
- provide practical support in finding childcare, organising benefits and applying for education, training and jobs
- help in the transition from benefit into work by providing 'better off' calculations, assisting with benefit claims and liaising with employers, the Benefits Agency and the Child Support Agency
- offer in-work support
- provide information on childcare
- provide help with applying for child maintenance

¹ Any readers interested in a full technical account of the study will find a detailed account in the technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming).

- and encourage effective programme delivery through partnership at a local level.

NDLP has developed and changed over time as follows:

- A prototype was launched in July and August 1997 in eight areas (Phase One). The programme was then introduced nationally for new and repeat claimants in April 1998 (Phase Two). This was extended to all existing lone parents on Income Support in October 1998 (Phase Three).²
- In addition to the geographical extension of the programme, NDLP has expanded its target population and rules of eligibility. Initially, the New Deal for Lone Parents was directed to those whose youngest child was aged over five years and three months (the target group), although those with younger children could join the programme by putting themselves forward (the non-target group). The target group was then extended to include lone parents whose youngest child was aged over three. Over time, the distinction between the target and non-target group has diminished, as the numbers of lone parents coming forward have been found to be similar among those with older and younger children. More recently, it was announced that eligibility would be extended to all lone parents from October 2001, including those who do not receive benefit but who want the support and advice offered by the programme.
- Finally, there have been some experiments with the voluntary nature of help given to lone parents. While NDLP has remained voluntary, two related policy developments, the ONE³ Pilots and Personal Adviser Meetings,⁴ have introduced compulsory initial interviews for lone parents and other groups at the start of a claim for benefit, and at intervals while the claim is ongoing.

1.2 The Policy Context

While this research focuses specifically on the New Deal for Lone Parents, it should be understood as one part of a trend in social policy both in Britain and other countries.

In recent decades, there have been striking increases in the proportion of families headed by lone parents. In 1971, eight per cent of families were headed by a lone parent. By 1995, this had risen to a quarter (24 per cent) of families (Ford and Millar, 1998).

² Phase Three forms the focus of this study. Phase One was evaluated elsewhere (Hales, J. *et al.*, 2000).

³ In June 1999 the government introduced ONE (previously known as the single work-focused gateway) in four pilot areas and later extended this to eight others. In all these areas, people of working age who claim benefits are allocated a Personal Adviser and their initial assessment interview includes discussion about employment opportunities. After an initial start up period, participation in these initial interviews has been compulsory.

⁴ In October 2000, taking part in a Personal Adviser meeting became a condition for lone parents with children over the age of five and three months who claimed Income Support and resided in three pathfinder areas. The programme of Personal Adviser Meetings was extended nationally in Spring 2001.

The characteristics of the lone parent population have also changed, with a growing proportion having low human capital and poor chances of finding work⁵ and more lone parent families being dependent on benefit. Between 1971 and 1995, the number of lone parent families dependent on Income Support (and its predecessor, Supplementary Benefit) increased absolutely, and also as a percentage of all lone parent families (from 37 per cent to 59 per cent). Though many lone parents have quite short spells on benefit, a large number remain dependent on benefits for long periods of time.

Dependence on Income Support is particularly challenging because it is often characterised by hardship, and in this instance, a high incidence of child poverty. This is manifested in different ways including poor nutrition, clothing, housing and heating, and limited access to transport and public services.

Lone parents' benefit dependency is also associated with low levels of employment. Increasingly, attitudes towards parenting have changed, so that more people advocate work rather than full time caring, should the parent want to do so. However, while levels of employment have increased among other mothers, this has not been the case for lone mothers, who have faced particular barriers to the labour market.

In response to a combination of these factors, lone parents have come to form a significant focus of public policy. Figure 1 sets out some of the main policy developments which have been introduced in recent years. There has been recognition in the last decade that lone parents are a diverse group, and that, in order to overcome the barriers they face in entering employment, a combination of policies is required. A key area of policy has been in-work benefits, of which Family Credit (and its successor, Working Families Tax Credit) have been the most important. The latter includes a Childcare Tax Credit which is of particular significance for lone parents. These in-work benefits recognise the limited earnings capacity of people in particular circumstances. They intend to ensure that being in work 'pays'. There have been other work incentive measures, which have included the Back To Work Bonus, the Job Grant (previously Jobfinder's Grant), Extended Payments of Housing Benefit and the Lone Parent Benefit Run-On. These measures focus on the transition to work, reflecting concern that insecurity at this stage can undermine the wish to enter or increase employment. Other key policies which have been introduced to help remove the barriers to work faced by lone parents are the Minimum Wage, and the National Childcare Strategy.

The New Deal for Lone Parents exemplifies an important new emphasis on tackling the barriers to leaving benefit, in that it addresses the *delivery* as well as the *substance* of policy directed at lone parents. However, the policy environment surrounding NDLP rarely remains static and these different measures are intended to have a cumulative or complementary effect.

⁵ Holtermann *et al.*, 1999.

The New Deal for Lone Parents also needs to be understood as one of a group of New Deal initiatives targeted at individuals.⁶ Although the premise of all New Deals is that each claimant receives a personalised package of help and advice, there are some significant differences between the programmes. For example, the programmes for young people and for the long-term unemployed are compulsory while others, like NDLP, are voluntary. This means that claimants are not required to attend an initial interview or take up any specific

⁶ Other New Deals targeted at individuals exist for young people who are unemployed, those unemployed over the long term, people with disabilities, individuals over 50 who are unemployed, musicians and partners (initially of the unemployed). There is also a New Deal for Communities.

Figure 1 Selected Social Security Policy Initiatives Since 1988**1988**

Implementation of the Fowler social security review.
 Replacement of special needs payments with the Social Fund.
 Replacement of Supplementary Benefit with Income Support, loss of additional payment for extended spells of lone parenthood.
 Replacement of Family Income Supplement with Family Credit - subsidy for low-waged working families (couples and lone parents) where at least one partner works 24 hours or more each week and where income falls below a family-specific threshold; payments normally made to the mother.

1992

Maintenance disregard in Family Credit.
 Minimum number of hours work each week to claim Family Credit reduced to 16.

1994

Introduction of the childcare disregard - up to £40 of income spent on formal childcare disregarded in the calculation of means-tested benefits.

1995

Introduction of a bonus in Family Credit for work of 30 hours or more each week.

1996

Childcare disregard increased to £60.
 Introduction of Back to Work Bonus payments on movement from part-time to full-time work.

1997

Introduction of Child Maintenance Bonus payments on movement into full-time work.
 Launch of New Deal for Lone Parents in eight prototype areas.

1998

Lone parent premium in Income Support and One Parent Benefit abolished for lone parents making a new claim.
 Childcare disregard increased to £100 where two or more children are eligible (children up to age 12).
 New Deal for Lone Parents implemented nationally.
 Improved provision for work-related training within NDLP.
 Introduction of linking rule to preserve benefit entitlement for breaks of up to twelve weeks.

1999

Introduction of Working Families Tax Credit.
 Introduction of New Deal For Lone Parents Innovative Pilots.
 Introduction of National Minimum Wage.

2000

Target group extended to those with a youngest child aged three or over (formerly aged five and three months or over).
 Introduction of compulsory Personal Adviser meetings in three 'pathfinder' areas.
 Introduction of In-Work Training Grant pilots.

2001

National introduction of compulsory Personal Adviser meetings.
 Extension of New Deal For Lone Parents to non-Income Support benefit recipients.

2002

Extension of eligibility to New Deal For Lone Parents to non-benefit recipients.

Source: Adapted from Ford and Millar, 1998, and Hales *et al.*, 2000

options. Another important difference is that in some instances, such as the New Deals for Young People and the Long-term Unemployed, substantial subsidies are available to employers to encourage them to recruit New Deal participants. These employer subsidies do not exist with the New Deal for Lone Parents. Some money is available, however, to help cover certain travel, childcare and training costs while attending interviews with Personal Advisers or taking approved training courses.

Finally, it is worth considering briefly some of the international equivalents of NDLP for which evaluation results are available. For example, adviser based, active labour market policies for lone parents exist in Australia with the Jobs Employment and Training (JET) programme and in California with the Greater Avenues for Independence Programme (GAIN). Evaluations of such programmes show that they have usually resulted in modest overall reductions in welfare benefit expenditure and dependency. Similarly, evidence from the evaluation of the NDLP prototype shows that the programme had a small effect on the rate of movement off Income Support (Hales *et al.*, 2000).

1.3 Evaluating the Programme

The Employment Service has commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions and the Benefits Agency.⁷ The evaluation strategy has been designed to reflect current policy requirements within Government. It has been commissioned in several parts. The various research strands are designed to answer a range of questions. In brief, they are:

- early qualitative work with lone parents carried out by Cragg, Ross & Dawson (CRD, 2000)
- a customer satisfaction survey with 300 lone parents covering what lone parents think about the services they have received, whether they have found them helpful and whether they have lived up to expectations (Martin Hamblin, 2001)
- case studies about the delivery of New Deal For Lone Parents (GHK Economics and Management, 2000)
- qualitative research with employers (Lewis *et al.*, 2001)
- quantitative surveys of lone parents, which are described in this report, and
- a macro-economic evaluation including cost benefit analysis and analysis of management information and administrative data sources (to be conducted internally by ES Research and Development Division).

In addition, the evaluation of New Deal for Lone Parents is able to draw on:

- the evaluation of the New Deal For Lone Parents prototype (Hales, *et al.*, 2000)
- separate evaluations of innovative schemes (Yeandle and Pearson, 2001) and In-Work Training Grant pilots (Policy Studies Institute/Office for National Statistics, forthcoming)
- analyses of lone parents using the Labour Force Survey (Holtermann *et al.*, 1999), and
- an analysis of benefit accuracy, overpayments and fraud by BA Quality Support Teams.

⁷ Ministerial responsibilities changed after the June 2001 election. Previously, the relevant Departments were the Department for Education and Employment and the Department for Social Security.

The main aim of the evaluation is to assess how far the New Deal for Lone Parents meets its objectives, mentioned earlier:

- to help and encourage lone parents on Income Support to improve their prospects and living standards by taking up or increasing paid work
- to improve the job readiness of lone parents on Income Support to increase their employment opportunities.

There are four main sets of questions which the evaluation, as a whole, might be expected to answer:

1.3.1 The Characteristics of the New Deal For Lone Parents Eligible Population

- Aside from meeting the criteria for programme participation, what are the distinguishing characteristics of participants and non-participants in NDLP?
- What is their experience of work and what are their prospects in the future?
- How many want to work and what are the barriers they face now?
- What kind of help are they looking for and what do they want to do?

1.3.2 Explaining Participation and Non-participation

- What factors affect lone parents' attachment to the labour market?
- What factors affect participation in the programme?
- What affects the timing and duration of participation (i.e. how do people enter the programme and how and why do people decide to stop taking part)?

1.3.3 Experiences of the New Deal for Lone Parents

- What are lone parents' experiences of the programme?
- Are they satisfied with the programme and with Personal Advisers?
- How do they rate the assistance they receive with access to jobs, to training and education, and to childcare?
- How do they rate any other help they received, and what would they have liked from the programme that they did not get?

1.3.4 The Effects of the New Deal for Lone Parents

- What is the impact of the New Deal for Lone Parents on lone parents' leaving Income Support or taking up or increasing hours of work?
- What is the impact of NDLP on job search activity or becoming more job ready?
- What training are lone parents receiving now and what training is wanted in the future? Does NDLP have an impact on the training and education that lone parents receive and what effect does training have on employment outcomes and on other outcomes such as preparedness to work and confidence?

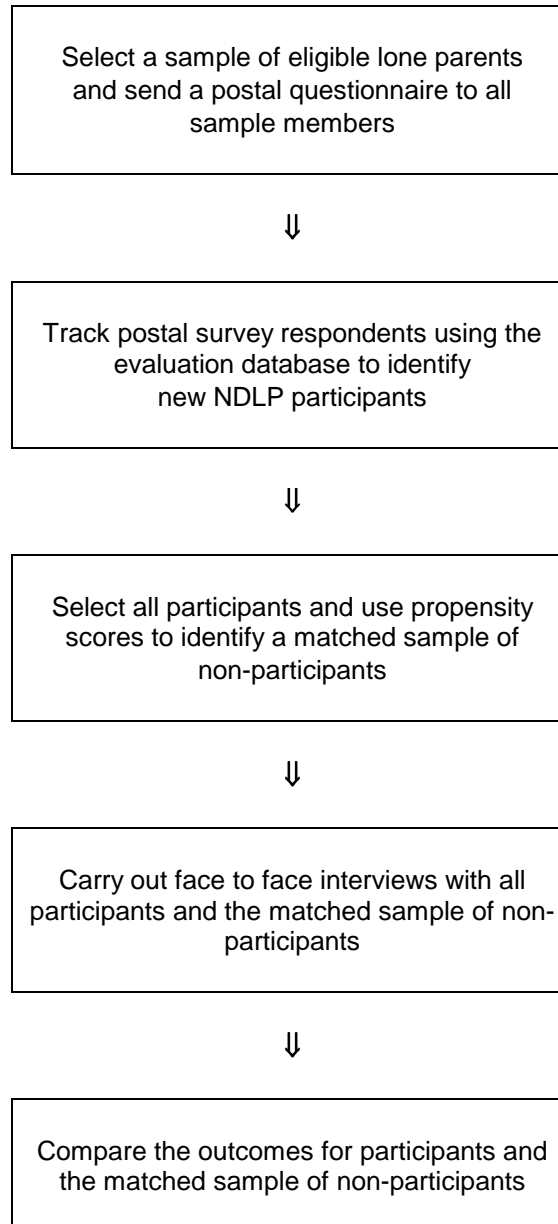
- For those lone parents who move into or increase employment, what effect does NDLP have on earnings and wages and household income? What evidence is there of financial effects on the children of NDLP participants? What is the impact of NDLP on lone parents' take-up of benefits (especially in-work benefits)?
- What effect is NDLP having on other factors, such as access to childcare, lone parents' confidence and their perceived degree of exclusion?

The quantitative element of the evaluation reported here is designed to answer some, but not all, of these questions. The quantitative surveys are particularly valuable in so far as they can address, in some aspects, the impact of the programme and hence the justification for continued investment in the Personal Adviser service. The timing of the quantitative research is somewhat later than some other aspects of the evaluation, in order for the programme to have sufficient time to have bedded in and to deliver measurable effects.

1.4 Aims and Methods of the Quantitative Evaluation

The research design for the quantitative element of the evaluation was developed so that ultimately it would provide data about lone parents, with approximately equal numbers who had participated in the programme and others who had not. This will allow for an exploration of the characteristics of the eligible population, reasons for participation, experience of the programme and an assessment of its effects.

The overall design has been developed and adapted to provide a robust estimate of the impact of the programme. To make this estimate, it is necessary to be able to describe what would have been the situation of lone parents if the programme had not existed. This is known as the 'counterfactual.' However, the counterfactual cannot be observed directly, because the programme has been implemented throughout Britain. As a result, the following design has been developed. It has five key stages which are described more fully in the technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming):



This approach is known as a matched comparison sample design in which some people who do not participate in the programme are carefully selected so that they can act as a control group for those who do. A version of this method was used in the evaluation of the TOPS programme (Payne 1990), the evaluation of Employment Training and Employment Action programmes (Payne 1996) and the evaluation of Training for Work (Payne 1999). There are two factors which make this study distinct from these earlier ones.

First, the procedure to be used for matching participants and non-participants involves calculating a 'propensity score' which is an estimate of the probability that an individual participates in the programme. The comparison sample will be identified by matching participants to non-participants with a similar propensity score. This is a technique which has been used to estimate the counterfactual situation on other New Deal programmes in Britain (Lissenburgh, 2001, Bonjour, *et al.*, 2001).

The other key factor is that the propensity scores will be estimated on the basis of information from administrative sources and the postal survey of lone parents, which was conducted in the Autumn and Winter of 2000/2001, before some respondents participated in the programme. The postal survey data provides information on the experiences and attitudes of the lone parents which previous analysis suggests are strongly related to the propensity to participate, and so usefully supplement administrative data. The methods used are described in more detail in the technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming).

At this interim reporting stage, the postal survey data is used as a resource for the evaluation in its own right, to describe the population eligible to participate in the programme rather than to draw conclusions about programme impact. An analysis of the impact of the programme will be the focus of the final report, which will draw on a major face to face interview survey to be conducted between October 2001 and early January 2002, following up a sample of the respondents to the postal survey.

1.4.1 Details of the Postal Survey

The low rate of participation in the New Deal for Lone Parents among those eligible to take part made it necessary to carry out an initial postal survey with an unusually large sample. The questionnaire was sent to 70,000 lone parents between October 2000 and April 2001. Just less than 65 per cent responded.

From this sample of respondents, those who participated in NDLP after returning their questionnaire will be matched with non-participants on key characteristics. Intensive face to face interviews will be conducted among both groups in the next stage of the project, beginning in Autumn 2001.

Although the identification of participants and non-participants was the primary purpose of the postal survey, it also serves as a key tool for analysis in its own right. Due to the large number of questionnaires returned, there is potential to use the postal survey data set to analyse interesting sub-groups of the lone parent population, such as male lone parents, black and Asian lone parents and those who were in their early teens when their first child was born. Although the scope of this report is limited, there is considerable potential for further analysis of the rich data provided by the postal survey.

The postal survey gathered data about lone parents' demographic characteristics, qualifications, work experience, motivation, and barriers to work. Additional questions about work in the past, present and future would have been informative, but the amount of data collected was minimised in the interests of maintaining a high response rate.

It would have been useful to ask about the occupation in which the lone parent had worked in their last job (that is, for their job title and description of the work they did); however, their level of qualifications would presumably correlate with this to some extent. It would also have been helpful to know about their wage

rate in past and current jobs, but questions were restricted to one about whether the lone parent would accept a job where the pay was at the statutory minimum wage. Although the information collected about lone parents and work is necessarily limited, the basic data collected provides many insights into the lives of the lone parent population.

When considering this report, it is important to appreciate that the issue of work is potentially sensitive to a population of Income Support recipients. The rules allow a lone parent to have earnings of up to £15 per week (increasing to £20 per week) without any effect on the level of benefit. Earnings beyond this limit should be reported to the Benefits Agency, which makes an adjustment to the benefit in proportion to the amount earned.

While it is possible to claim Income Support while working, failure to report this as a change of circumstances puts the lone parent in the position of claiming fraudulently. Furthermore, lone parents in paid work for 16 hours per week or more are no longer entitled to receive Income Support. If their earnings are in the appropriate range, they are entitled to receive Working Families Tax Credit and may receive additional support through measures such as Job Grant (previously Jobfinder's Grant), Extended Payments of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit and the Lone Parent Benefit Run-On. If they have declared their earnings while they were working part-time, they may be eligible for the Back to Work Bonus. These rules and requirements are complex and some lone parents find them perplexing or frustrating. These considerations are important for this research. Although the questionnaire and covering letter stressed that responding would have no effect on entitlement to benefits, asking those receiving benefits about their work involved some risk of inaccuracy. Concern about being asked questions about working while claiming Income Support may have resulted in some questions not being answered fully, as well as some lone parents deciding not to complete the questionnaire at all.

1.5 Coverage and Objectives of this Report

This interim report presents selected findings from the postal stage of the quantitative study. Its main focus is on the characteristics of the population eligible for the New Deal for Lone Parents. Each chapter examines a particular facet of the eligible population's background and experience as follows:

- **Chapter 2** describes the population of lone parents claiming Income Support and eligible to join the programme in Autumn 2000 in terms of their age, sex, ethnicity, age and number of children, tenure, qualifications, location and duration on benefit.
- **Chapter 3** examines the past work experience of the eligible population, with a particular focus on lone parents who have never worked.
- **Chapter 4** focuses on the current work experience of lone parents who identified themselves as employed at the time of the survey.
- **Chapter 5** focuses on the work intentions of those lone parents who were not working at the time of the survey.

- **Chapter 6** is concerned with attitudes about aspects of work, childcare and parenting, as well as work and training.
- **Chapter 7** looks at lone parents' use of services and at their interest in receiving support and advice to find work and training. Data about their engagement and interest in education or training is also examined.
- **Chapter 8** identifies individuals who participated in NDLP after returning their postal questionnaire. Key differences between participants and non-participants are outlined, and a brief description of early progress toward developing a multivariate model of participation is provided.
- **Chapter 9** presents the conclusions of this study.

The technical report associated with this study (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming) provides more detail about the research study. It covers questionnaire development and piloting, the sample design, conduct of the postal survey, its analysis and weighting, and an initial description of propensity score derivation to match participants with non-participants.

2 Characteristics of the Lone Parent Population

The postal survey was designed as a way of identifying the sample required for the face to face interviews in Autumn 2001. This involved identifying a group of people who participated in the New Deal for Lone Parents and a group of lone parents who shared many of the same characteristics but were non-participants. While this was its primary purpose, the postal survey also generated information about a very large number of lone parents who were eligible for the programme and receiving Income Support between August and October 2000. These data can be examined to understand the characteristics of the lone parent population eligible to join NDLP and this is the focus of this section. In order to give an accurate description, the postal survey data is weighted to ensure that it is representative of the national lone parent population on Income Support at the time the sample was drawn.⁸

2.1 Age, Sex, Ethnicity and Employment Service Region

As expected, the great majority of lone parents receiving Income Support were women, with just 6 per cent who were men (Table 2.1.1).

Table 2.1.1 Sex of lone parents

Sex of lone parent	All %
Women	94
Men	6
Weighted base	41,916
Unweighted base	41,941

Base: All lone parents⁹

Table 2.1.2 shows that the average age of lone parents varied quite substantially between men and women.¹⁰ Nineteen per cent of lone mothers were under the age of 25, compared to only three per cent of lone fathers. This reflects the different routes of entry into lone parenthood; many more lone mothers begin parenthood on their own, while almost all male lone parents take up primary responsibility for their children following a separation or divorce from their partner.

Even though the proportion of male lone parents was quite small, responses from a large number of lone fathers can be examined because of the very large initial sample size. Indeed, one of the great strengths of the postal survey is the

⁸ Weights adjust for the differential probability of selecting each individual and for the differences in response rates. Further details are provided in the technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming).

⁹ As explained in the Conventions, bases reported in each table may vary due to non-response to specific questions.

¹⁰ The eligibility threshold for this study was men under 65 and women under 60.

potential for analysing relatively small but interesting and important sub-groups of the lone parent population.

Table 2.1.2 Age and sex of lone parents

Age of lone parent	Sex		Total %
	Women %	Men %	
16 – 19	4	1	4
20 – 24	15	2	15
25 – 29	19	7	18
30 – 34	24	19	24
35 – 39	19	23	19
40 – 44	12	21	12
45 – 64	7	27	9
Weighted base	39,284	2,632	41,916
Unweighted base	39,579	2,362	41,941

Base: All lone parents

Table 2.1.3 illustrates that the great majority (85 per cent) of lone parents were white. Nevertheless, a significant minority (5 per cent) reported that they were black (defined in the questionnaire as Caribbean, African or other), comprising approximately 2,000 individuals. In addition, three per cent defined themselves as Asian (Indian, Pakistani or Bangladeshi), about 0.2 per cent as Chinese and two per cent as being of mixed race. A further one per cent belonged to another ethnic group, and another two per cent did not respond to this question.

Table 2.1.3 Ethnic group of lone parents

Ethnic group	All %
White	85
Black	5
Asian	3
Chinese	*
Mixed race	2
Other groups	1
Prefer not to say	2
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Note: A specific answer code was available for those who preferred not to state their ethnic group

There was no significant difference between the profiles of different ethnic minority groups by sex, however their age profiles did vary in important ways (Table 2.1.4). The most striking difference between the ethnic groups was that Asian and Black lone parents were less likely than white lone parents to be under 24 and they were more likely to be aged over 40. Asian lone parents in particular were older than their counterparts in other ethnic groups, with 35 per cent aged 40 or over.

Table 2.1.4 Age profile of different ethnic groups

Age of lone parent	Ethnic group				Total %
	White %	Black %	Asian %	Mixed/ other %	
16 – 19	4	2	1	4	4
20 – 24	15	10	9	15	15
25 – 29	19	13	16	16	18
30 – 34	24	25	20	22	24
35 – 39	19	24	19	20	19
40 – 44	12	14	16	14	12
45 – 64	8	11	19	9	9
Weighted base	35,809	2,081	1,345	1,318	40,553
Unweighted base	35,728	2,163	1,440	1,308	40,639

Base: All lone parents

Table 2.1.5 shows the age of lone parents by Employment Service region. In order to present the results in a single table, percentages are calculated by row. For instance, eight per cent of lone parents in the North West were under 25, compared with ten per cent of lone parents in Wales.

Interestingly, the table reveals that lone parents in London and the South East were older, on average, than lone parents in other regions. Fifty-six per cent were aged 35 or over compared with 50 per cent in Scotland, 44 per cent in the Northern region, and so forth. Only 51 per cent were over the age of 35. The same phenomenon can be seen by studying the percentage in each region under the age of 35. In London and the South East, that percentage is 44, compared with 50 per cent or more for the rest of the regions.

Table 2.1.5 Lone parent's age by Employment Service region

Employment Service region		Age of lone parent				Weighted Base	Unweighted Base
		Under 25	25-34	35-44	45-64		
Office for Scotland	%	8	42	40	10	2,247	2,242
Northern	%	9	46	36	8	1,151	1,192
North West	%	8	44	37	11	4,432	4,691
Yorkshire and Humberside	%	9	47	36	9	1,224	1,332
Office for Wales	%	10	44	37	9	1,583	1,605
West Midlands	%	7	44	38	11	1,774	1,791
East Midlands and Eastern	%	8	43	39	10	1,795	1,836
South West	%	8	42	38	12	1,611	1,657
London & South East	%	6	38	44	12	7,349	6,927
Total	%	7	42	40	11	23,167	23,273

Base: All lone parents

Note: Percentages calculated by row

2.2 Age and Number of Children

Table 2.2.1 shows the number of children under 18 that were cared for by lone parents on Income Support.¹¹ It is apparent from other research that the number of children a lone parent has is potentially important in explaining the barriers they face returning to work. Indeed, lone parents with more children were less likely to have completed a postal survey questionnaire, based on an analysis of survey non-response (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming). In fact, the largest group of lone parents (42 per cent) had just one child, but a further 34 per cent had two and 16 per cent had three. A minority, eight per cent of all lone parents on Income Support, had four or more children in their care.

Table 2.2.1 Number of children under 18

Number of children	All %
One	42
Two	34
Three	16
Four or more	8
Weighted base	42,019
Unweighted base	42,022

Base: All lone parents

Previous research also indicates that the age of the lone parent's youngest child tends to be a good indicator of the difficulty they might face thinking about or actually returning to work. The survey shows that almost half (47 per cent) of lone parents on Income Support had children under five years old, split between 17 per cent whose youngest child was above and 30 per cent whose youngest child was below the age of three. A slightly larger group consisted of lone parents whose youngest child was in primary school (33 per cent) with a further 20 per cent of the population of lone parents on Income Support having at least one child still in secondary school (Table 2.2.2).

Table 2.2.2 Age of youngest child

Age of youngest child	All %
Under 3 years	30
3 to under 5 years	17
5 to under 11 years	33
11 to 18 years	20
Weighted base	41,768
Unweighted base	41,770

Base: All lone parents

These different groups are subject to different policy efforts in the expectation that they will face different barriers to work. For example, lone parents whose

¹¹ This analysis uses 18 as the upper age limit for children, as did the questionnaire. Official policy regards those eligible as those with one or more children aged up to the age of 16.

youngest child is between 11 and 16¹² may be less constrained by childcare responsibilities but may be more remote from the labour market after a longer gap from work. This survey identifies sufficiently large numbers to allow for this type of relationship to be investigated more fully.

2.3 Tenure, Car and Telephone

In addition to collecting basic information about the lone parents' children, the postal survey gathered data on tenure, whether the individual had a full driving licence and whether they had use of a telephone at home.

Table 2.3.1 shows that two thirds of lone parents claiming Income Support rented from the local authority or housing association, with a further 15 per cent renting from a private landlord. In total, therefore, over 80 per cent were renting, far more than in the general population. Only ten per cent of lone parents claiming Income Support had a mortgage or owned their own home. A further six per cent lived with their parents or another relative while just two per cent had some other arrangement.

Table 2.3.1 Tenure of lone parents

Tenure of lone parent	All %
Own or mortgage	10
Rent from council or housing association	66
Rent from private landlord	15
Live with parents or relatives	6
Other arrangements	2
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Table 2.3.2 indicates that living with parents or relatives was most common among the youngest lone parents. This was the case for 15 per cent of those under the age of 25 and five per cent of lone parents between the ages of 25 and 34. Older lone parents were more likely than their younger counterparts to own their home outright or have a mortgage. Indeed, the proportion who owned or had a mortgage increased steeply as a proportion of successive age bands. For example, while six per cent of lone parents between the ages of 25 and 34 owned their own home or had a mortgage, 16 per cent of those between 35 and 44, and 21 per cent of those aged 45 or over, did so. It is probably safe to assume that many of these were lone parents who had kept the family home after a divorce.

¹² While eligibility for Income Support continues while a youngest child aged 17 or 18 is in full-time education, the NDLP position is that the programme targets lone parents whose youngest child is aged up to 16. It is felt that those with a youngest child aged 17 or 18 could be claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, and that there are likely to be circumstances such as ill health which explain the continuation of the Income Support claim in these circumstances.

This table also shows that among 25 to 34 year olds (who were less likely than older parents to own or have a mortgage for their home *and* were less likely than younger lone parents to live with parents or relatives) 88 per cent were renters. This is the age group with the highest incidence both of renting from the Council or housing association and renting from a private landlord.

Table 2.3.2 Tenure by lone parent's age

Tenure of lone parent	Age of lone parent				Total %
	Under 25 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-64 %	
Own or mortgage	1	6	16	21	10
Rent from council or housing assoc.	65	70	67	64	67
Rent from private landlord	17	18	13	12	16
Live with parents or relatives	15	5	2	2	5
Other arrangements	2	2	1	2	2
Weighted base	7,600	17,288	13,102	3,576	41,566
Unweighted base	7,529	17,489	13,206	3,371	41,595

Base: All lone parents

Individuals who live in social housing tend to be associated with the greatest levels of material deprivation, so the high rates of renting observed among this population should act as a warning. For lone parents, however, the relationship between tenure and deprivation may be slightly more complex. For example, housing policy takes lone parent status into account and so makes the interpretation of tenure more complex. Social and private renters are usually eligible to receive Housing Benefit, both out of work and if they take up low-paid work. Furthermore, other tenure statuses may be problematic in this context. For example, lone parent families on Income Support may also struggle financially if they are mortgagees receiving Income Support Mortgage Interest.

Another important indicator of the circumstances of lone parents and their possible experience of deprivation is the proportion that did not have use of a telephone. Table 2.3.3 shows that overall, 21 per cent of all lone parents had no telephone at home, a far higher proportion than in the general population, where around four per cent of all households have no use of a phone (Bridgwood, 2000).

Table 2.3.3 Use of a home telephone

Use of a home telephone	All %
Had access to home phone	76
Did not have access	21
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Table 2.3.4 shows the relationship between these two variables.¹³ It indicates that those in council or housing association property do, at least in this respect, experience greater hardship with almost one quarter (24 per cent) not having use of a phone at home, compared to just eight per cent who own their home or have a mortgage and 21 per cent of those renting from a private landlord.

Table 2.3.4 Use of a home telephone by tenure

Use of a home telephone	Tenure				Total %
	Own/ mortgage %	Council/ Housing Assoc. %	Private landlord %	Parents/ relative/ Other %	
Had access to home phone	92	76	79	83	78
Did not have access	8	24	21	17	22
Weighted base	3,953	25,353	6,402	2,950	40,657
Unweighted base	4,318	26,615	6,576	3,239	40,748

Base: All lone parents

Having no phone can be thought of as an indicator of deprivation or isolation, but another way to regard this is as a measure of the ease with which a lone parent might be able to pursue work opportunities, or draw on resources (such as NDLP) to get help or support in doing so.

Having a driving licence is another factor which could be associated with the capacity to find work. Previous research among the unemployed showed that this variable helped distinguish between those who were and were not able to return to work.¹⁴ Among lone parents, only about two fifths (37 per cent) reported that they had a full driving licence (Table 2.3.5). When the face-to-face interviews are conducted in Autumn 2001 it is likely that only a proportion of these lone parents will indicate they actually have use of a vehicle. This suggests that the lone parent population on Income Support is highly dependent on public transport, and that many lone parents will face significant barriers to travelling to job interviews or work. This finding supports other research which suggests that lone parents have small travel to work areas, as they need to combine work with their responsibilities for caring for the family.

Table 2.3.5 Driving licence

Holds full driving licence	All %
Yes	37
No	60
No answer given	3
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

¹³ Lone parents who did not provide information about their tenure or telephone are excluded.

¹⁴ Hales, 1992 and Rayner *et al.* 2000.

2.4 Academic and Technical Qualifications

Analysis of the Labour Force Survey suggests that over a period of about two decades the lone parent population has shifted to include increasing numbers of individuals with few academic or technical qualifications and low human capital. Clearly, this has a direct bearing on the ease with which lone parents will be able to find work, perhaps particularly work which is well paid, satisfying and sustainable.

Table 2.4.1 shows that 56 per cent of the lone parent population have no academic qualifications at all or have none recorded,¹⁵ though more than a third (36 per cent) have some GCSEs, CSEs, SCEs or 'O' levels. The remaining eight per cent have 'A' levels, Scottish Highers or a degree.

Table 2.4.1 Academic qualifications

Academic qualifications	All %
None (or none recorded)	56
Lower grade GCSE/CSE/SCE/O level	16
Higher grade GCSE/CSE/SCE/O level	20
A levels/Highers	5
Degree or postgraduate degree	3
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Separate questions were posed about technical or vocational qualifications. Table 2.4.2 shows that ten per cent reported qualifications of this kind at a basic level, while a further 14 per cent recorded higher level technical qualifications.

Table 2.4.2 Technical qualifications

Technical qualifications	All %
None (or none recorded)	77
Basic/level 1	10
Intermediate/level 2	8
Advanced/level 3	4
Higher Certificate/level 4	2
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Since either academic or technical qualifications can provide a significant boost to an individual's employment prospects, a separate analysis was conducted on

¹⁵ This figure is higher than anticipated and may reflect reporting difficulties. This will be examined fully at the main stage of the study.

whether the lone parent had a qualification of either kind. Table 2.4.3 shows that just over half the lone parent population (51 per cent) had no recorded qualifications. A minority of lone parents (18 per cent) had both academic and technical qualifications.

Table 2.4.3 Whether or not has an academic or technical qualification

Any qualification	All %
None	51
Academic only	26
Technical only	5
Both	18
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

2.5 Duration of Income Support Claim

An important factor when considering the propensity of an individual to leave benefit, return to work or participate in a programme such as the New Deal for Lone Parents, is likely to be the amount of time they have spent on benefit. Previous research has established that a prolonged period out of the labour market often makes it significantly more difficult to return to work. This is an important consideration for lone parents who often feel poorly qualified for work and lack confidence about their chances of finding work (Hales *et al.*, 2000).

Table 2.5.1 shows that over one third (36 per cent) of the lone parent population had been receiving Income Support since the beginning of NDLP (Phase Three) in October 1998.¹⁶ This group is referred to as the ‘flow’ with more recent claims, in contrast to those in the ‘stock’ with claims of longer duration. In fact, ten per cent of the lone parent population had been on benefit for less than six months and, in total, one fifth had been on benefit for less than a year.

At the other end of the spectrum was a sizeable minority (37 per cent) who had been in receipt of Income Support for five years or more. Later in this report, the extent to which this long separation from the labour market affected (or reflected) specific attitudes to and expectations of the labour market is examined.

¹⁶ The length of spell on benefit is calculated from the date the individual's claim started relative to 1 October 2000 as this is the point when the whole sample were in receipt of Income Support. By the time of the postal survey and the writing of this report, some lone parents will have left benefit. In time, administrative data will be available which can be used to identify individuals who have left benefit. For the time being, the group is treated homogeneously, as if all its members once were, and still remain, on Income Support.

Table 2.5.1 Duration of Income Support Claim

Duration on benefit	All %
'Flow'	
Under 3 months	4
3 to under 6 months	6
6 to under 12 months	10
12 to under 2 years	16
'Stock'	
2 years to under 3 years	12
3 years to under 5 years	16
5 years to under 9 years	20
9 years or more	17
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273
Base: All lone parents	

As one might expect, the length of time lone parents had spent on benefit varied according to their sex and age. Table 2.5.2 suggests that women were somewhat more likely to have had longer spells on benefit, particularly of five years or over.

Table 2.5.2 Duration of Income Support claim by sex of lone parent

Duration on benefit	Sex		Total %
	Women %	Men %	
'Flow'			
Under 6 months	10	13	10
6 months to under 2 years	26	27	26
'Stock'			
2 years to under 5 years	28	27	27
5 years and over	37	33	37
Weighted base	39,284	2,632	41,916
Unweighted base	39,579	2,362	41,941
Base: All lone parents			

Unsurprisingly, the length of time lone parents had spent on benefit increases as one looks at successive age bands (Table 2.5.3). While 44 per cent of lone parents aged under 25 were members of the stock (with spells on benefit of two years or more) this rose to 77 per cent among those who were 45 years or older.

There was no statistically significant difference in the average length of time spent on benefit by different ethnic groups. Although Asian lone parents were statistically less likely to have spells on Income Support of over three years, this was the only significant variation observed.

Table 2.5.3 Duration of Income Support claim by lone parent's age

Duration on benefit	Age of lone parent				Total %
	Under 25 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-64 %	
'Flow'					
Under 6 months	14	10	9	7	10
6 months to under 2 years	42	25	20	16	26
'Stock'					
2 years to under 5 years	35	28	24	23	28
5 years and over	9	38	47	54	37
Weighted base	7,696	17,587	13,343	3,647	42,273
Unweighted base	7,626	17,781	13,427	3,439	42,273

Base: All lone parents

2.6 NDLP Participants and Non-participants

The postal survey was carried out among lone parents who, according to administrative records, had not yet participated in the New Deal for Lone Parents. This was ensured when drawing the sample by checking every individual's record against the New Deal Evaluation Database and removing anyone who was recorded as having taken part in a first interview with an NDLP Personal Adviser.

Once the sample was drawn and questionnaires posted, the sample was re-checked against the New Deal Evaluation Database, which was updated each month. Over time, more and more lone parents were gradually identified who had participated since they had been selected for the research. By the cut-off deadline, 1,209 individuals had taken part in NDLP and subsequently responded to the postal survey. This represents 2.5 per cent of all respondents. More importantly, 1,787 lone parents (3.9 per cent of all respondents) responded to the questionnaire and then took part in NDLP. In total, 2,996 (6 per cent) postal survey respondents participated in NDLP (Table 2.6.1).

In the remainder of this report, the focus is on those 1,787 lone parents who took part in NDLP after responding to the postal survey. Because their opinions and circumstances were gathered before they participated, the data they provided was not likely to have been influenced by the programme.

Table 2.6.1 Participants based on evaluation database up to May 2001

Participation in NDLP	All %
Not recorded as a participant	94
Recorded as a participant	6
Weighted base	42,273
Unweighted base	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Of course, administrative files may not be a perfect record of who has taken part so these figures may over or under-represent participants. The administrative definition of a participant is someone who has accepted an appointment for an interview with a Personal Adviser. Some people who have had quite substantial contact with the programme may not appear to have participated on administrative records, and others who are recorded as participants may not have had much contact, or may not report that they had participated in NDLP when they are interviewed face to face. At this stage administrative records must be relied on to identify the sub-group of participants. In time, however, this information will be supplemented with accounts given by a sub-sample of the respondents in the course of the face to face interviews.

At this point in the research project, it is possible to give only a preliminary description of who takes part in the programme and an outline of a model which defines the factors associated with participation. Nevertheless, some indicative findings are presented in Chapter 8 and a multivariate analysis of them is included in the technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming).

3 Past Experience of Work

Chapter 2 has described the characteristics of the lone parent population based on postal survey data. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are concerned with lone parents' experience of work. Chapter 3 distinguishes between three groups of lone parents: those who were currently in work at the time of the survey, those who were not working but had worked in the past, and those with no experience of work. Chapter 4 examines those presently working in greater detail, and Chapter 5 analyses those who have never worked.

The great majority of lone parents had experience of working in the past, but to a varying extent. The questions about past work covered only three topics: the hours worked per week, the dates when the job started and ended and arrangements for childcare. These details provide some useful insights into proximity to work, for example identifying those who had worked more recently and those who were able to arrange childcare while working.

3.1 Who Had Worked in the Past

Four out of five (82 per cent) lone parents had some experience of paid work. Nearly three-quarters (72 per cent) had worked in the past and a further ten per cent were in paid work at the time of the survey. The remaining 18 per cent had never worked. Table 3.1.1 shows how these three groups varied between four broad age bands. Apart from the youngest group, of whom nearly a quarter (23 per cent) had no work experience, the proportion with no work experience across the older age bands was fairly stable, at about 18 per cent.

Table 3.1.1 Work experience by lone parent's age

Work experience	Age of lone parent				Total %
	Under 25 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-64 %	
Currently working	8	10	13	10	10
Not working/worked in past	70	73	71	71	72
No work experience	23	18	16	18	18
Weighted base	7,424	16,735	12,483	3,361	40,004
Unweighted base	7,353	16,993	12,642	3,178	40,166

Base: All lone parents

Table 3.1.2 shows that men were somewhat less likely than women to have never worked. Indeed, 19 per cent of women had never worked, compared with 12 per cent of men. Nevertheless, given the general assertion that men are more strongly attached to work, it is striking that almost one in eight male lone parents did not report having any work experience in the past.

Table 3.1.2 Work experience by sex of lone parents

Work experience	Sex		Total %
	Female %	Male %	
Currently working	11	5	10
Not working/worked in past	71	82	71
No work experience	19	12	18
Weighted base	37,515	2,489	40,319
Unweighted base	37,923	2,243	40,464

Base: All lone parents

A strong association between qualifications and past work experience can be seen in Table 3.1.3. Compared with lone parents who had academic qualifications, those with no qualifications at all were three times as likely not to have worked. However, they were only slightly less likely than those with qualifications to be in work at the time of the survey.

Table 3.1.3 Work experience by whether or not lone parent has a qualification

Work experience	Types of qualifications held				Total %
	None %	Academic only %	Technical only %	Both academic and technical %	
Currently working	8	12	11	15	10
Not working/worked in past	65	78	75	79	71
No work experience	28	9	14	6	18
Weighted base	20,246	10,486	1,988	7,599	40,319
Unweighted base	19,140	10,925	2,079	8,320	40,464

Base: All lone parents

Table 3.1.4 shows a strong association between no work experience in the past and the lone parent being aged under 20 at the time of his or her first child's birth. Lone parents who were under the age of 16 when their first child was born were the most likely to have never worked (53 per cent). Those who were 20 years of age or older when their first child was born were much more likely to have some work experience, but even so, a significant portion of them had never worked.

Table 3.1.4 Work experience by approximate age at first child's birth

Work experience	Approximate age at birth of first child					Total %
	12-15 %	16-19 %	20-24 %	25-34 %	35 or over %	
Currently working	9	8	11	12	10	10
Not working/ worked in past	38	65	75	75	74	72
No work experience	53	27	15	13	16	18
Weighted base	378	10,602	14,485	11,570	2,624	39,659
Unweighted base	381	10,116	14,563	12,063	2,651	39,774

Base: All lone parents

Note: Ages at birth of first child estimated at 25 and over may be unreliable

In contrast to age at first birth, the age of the youngest child living with the lone parent at the time of the survey had almost no association with past work experience (Table 3.1.5). These findings confirm that a key factor in the work history of lone parents is the age at which they became parents (Hobcraft and Kiernan, 1999). Those crossing this threshold at a younger age may have missed the opportunity to receive career guidance as part of their schooling. Equally important, they may also have missed the experience of starting work alongside other young people, when employers' expectations of them would have likely made allowance for their inexperience. This group may be especially likely to benefit from the support and advice offered by NDLP, and can be identified through administrative records.

Table 3.1.5 Work experience by age of youngest child

Work experience	Age of youngest resident child				Total %
	Under 3 years %	3 to 5 years %	5 to 11 years %	11 to 18 years %	
Currently working	6	9	13	14	10
Not working/ Worked in past	75	73	70	68	72
No work experience	19	18	17	18	18
Weighted base	11,828	6,997	13,323	7,729	39,787
Unweighted base	12,047	7,315	14,093	6,566	40,021

Base: All lone parents

Past work experience demonstrated a fairly strong association with tenure (Table 3.1.6). Those living in owner-occupied accommodation (whether owned or on a mortgage) were most likely to have worked either in the past or present. Only nine per cent of them reported no work experience. This compares with one fifth of those living in social housing who had never worked. This latter group tended to demonstrate the highest levels of material deprivation, perhaps both cause and consequence of a lack of employment experience.

Those lone parents living with their parents or relatives also included a significant portion who had never worked (22 per cent). This effect is due in part to their relatively young age.

Table 3.1.6 Work experience by lone parent's tenure

Work experience	Lone parent's tenure				Total %
	Own/ Mortgage %	Council/ Housing Assoc. %	Private Rented %	Lives with parents %	
Currently working	19	9	11	10	10
Not working/ Worked in past	73	71	74	68	72
No work experience	9	20	16	22	18
Weighted base	3,888	26,736	6,255	2,885	39,764
Unweighted base	4,260	26,046	6,441	3,172	39,919

Base: All lone parents

The duration of the most recent Income Support claim (at the time of the postal survey starting in October 2000) was fairly strongly associated with whether the lone parent had ever worked. Among those whose claim had lasted under six months, 12 per cent had never worked. This percentage more than doubled among those whose claim was nine or more years in duration (27 per cent).

Interestingly, around ten per cent of each band of claim duration was working at the time of the survey. Only among those whose claim had lasted under six months was this proportion slightly higher (15 per cent). This suggests that lone parents in work when they completed the questionnaire were likely to be a fairly diverse group, for example in terms of the nature and amount of the work being carried out, as well as their experience on benefit.

Table 3.1.7 Work experience by duration of claim

Work experience	Duration of Income Support claim							Total %
	Under 6 mos %	6-12 mos %	12-24 mos %	24-36 mos %	3-5 years %	5-9 years %	9 years and over %	
Currently working	15	11	10	9	10	10	10	10
Not working/ worked in past	73	77	77	74	72	68	63	71
No work experience	12	12	13	18	18	22	27	18
Weighted base	4,141	3,940	6,475	4,798	6,304	8,058	6,603	40,319
Unweighted base	10,255	4,819	6,367	4,454	4,410	5,583	4,576	40,464

Base: All lone parents

3.2 When Last Job Was Held

The focus of this section of the report is last completed spell of work of all those who had worked at some time in the past. This group includes some of the lone

parents who were working at the time of the survey, but is concerned with their prior work. An important initial distinction to make about these past jobs is that they have three possible relationships to the Income Support claim, with fairly different connotations. By far the most common situation was where the past work had ended prior to the Income Support claim. However, some lone parents had started to claim Income Support while working and others had started their most recent past job since claiming Income Support (Table 3.2.1).

Each of these three types of job was associated with a quite distinctive range of hours. The smallest of the three groups included those whose job started more recently than their Income Support claim. Almost two-thirds of them (65 per cent) were working fewer than 16 hours per week. A quarter of them (27 per cent) were doing 'mini jobs' of five hours or less per week. About one in three (35 per cent) of these lone parents appeared to have been working 16 hours or more per week in their last job.

At the opposite extreme, nine in ten of the lone parents whose work ended prior to their Income Support claim had been working 16 hours per week or more. Of these, the great majority (67 per cent overall) had worked 30 hours per week or more. Thus full-time work (whether defined as 16 or 30 or more hours per week) was the norm for previous work experience among lone parents.

In-between these extremes, there was another small group of lone parents who started to claim Income Support before their last job came to an end. Among this group, it may be noted that very few were working fewer than 5 hours per week, but it was fairly common to be working fewer than 16 hours per week, with about one in five (19 per cent) lone parents in this category. Three-quarters (78 per cent) of these lone parents had worked full-time. It is possible, however, that their responses related to the greater part of their period in work, and it may not have applied in the later stage of their job, when they had started to receive Income Support.

Table 3.2.1 Hours per week by timing of last job relative to Income Support claim

Hours per week in last job	Start of Income Support (IS) claim relative to last job			Total %
	Last job before IS %	IS Claim during last job %	Last job since IS claim %	
5 hours or less	1	4	27	3
6 to 15 hours	9	19	38	12
16 to 29 hours	23	31	17	23
30 or more hours	67	47	18	62
Weighted base	17,955	2,027	1,381	21,408
Unweighted base	19,634	1,994	1,165	22,793

Base: All lone parents who had a job in the past

3.3 Time in Last Job

The questionnaire asked lone parents to write in the month and year in which their last job had started as well as when it had ended. A comparison of these dates indicates the approximate duration of the job (Table 3.3.1).

The main finding in Table 3.3.1 is that there was a good deal of variation in the length of the last paid job, irrespective of the duration of the Income Support claim. Those with shorter claim duration were slightly more likely to report shorter spells in their last paid job, as opposed to those with longer claim duration's.

Table 3.3.1 Time in last job by duration of benefit claim

Work experience (time in last job)	Duration of Income Support Claim				Total %
	Under 6 months %	6 months to under 24 months %	24 months to under 5 years %	5 years or more %	
Up to 6 months	21	18	12	9	14
6 months under 1 year	15	15	13	10	13
1 year under 2 years	20	22	22	20	21
2 years under 3 years	14	13	14	15	14
3 years under 5 years	13	13	14	17	15
5 years under 9 years	10	10	15	17	13
9 years or more	9	9	11	13	11
Weighted base	2,717	6,370	5,916	6,522	21,524
Unweighted base	6,718	6,825	4,756	4,578	22,877

Base: All lone parents whose last job preceded their Income Support claim

3.4 Childcare while Working

The great majority of lone parents' last jobs preceded their claim for Income Support and most of these lone parents were working 30 hours or more per week (Table 3.2.1). The focus of this section is the childcare arrangements associated with those jobs.

Table 3.4.1 Childcare arrangements by hours worked

Whether used childcare	Hours worked in past job				Total %
	Under 5 hours %	6 to 15 hours %	16 to 29 hours %	30 hours or more %	
Any type of childcare used	89	93	96	94	94
No childcare used	11	7	4	6	6
Weighted base	770	2,287	4,373	5,113	12,543
Unweighted base	715	2,518	5,683	5,713	14,629

Base: All lone parents who worked in past and had children at that time

The great majority of lone parents who had children when they were working had used some form of childcare covered by the codes provided on the

questionnaire (Table 3.4.1). Although the questionnaire implied that the childcare might have been connected with times when the lone parent was working, this was not a necessary condition for the question. It may well be the case that some lone parents who reported the use of childcare were referring to arrangements which they made outside working hours.

Overall, less than one in ten (6 per cent) of the lone parents had not used one or more forms of childcare. The level of use was highest among those working full-time, that is 16 hours per week or more. It was slightly lower among those working under six hours per week.

Table 3.4.2 shows the extent to which these lone parents made use of different types of childcare arrangements, again in relation to their hours of work per week. The use of relatives or friends was by far the most common arrangement, particularly among those working full-time and only slightly less for those working under six hours per week. Lone parents working full-time were more likely to have used a child minder or an after-school or holiday playscheme. There appeared to be little difference related to hours of work in the use of nursery, crèche, playgroup or school, implying that these types of childcare were available to all those who had children in the appropriate age ranges.

Table 3.4.2 Childcare arrangements by hours worked

Types of childcare used	Hours worked in past job				Total %
	Under 6 hours %	6 to 15 hours %	16 to 29 hours %	30 hours or more %	
Relatives, friends or partner	78	85	87	84	85
Nursery, crèche, playgroup or school	29	24	26	26	26
Au pair or Nanny	1	*	*	2	1
Child minder	3	5	8	16	10
After school or holiday playscheme	3	3	6	7	6
Weighted base	688	2,130	4,181	4,819	11,819
Unweighted base	636	2,346	5,444	5,421	13,847

Base: All lone parents who worked in past and had children at that time

* Less than 0.5 per cent

3.5 Conclusions about Past Work

Most lone parents claiming Income Support had some experience of work, although 18 per cent reported no prior work experience. A strong association was found between a lack of qualifications, accommodation in social housing, and never having worked. In addition, those lacking work experience tended to be women, in the younger age bands, and with longer spells on Income Support. They also tended to be younger at the time of their first child's birth, suggesting they may have missed out on early socialisation to work occurring as part of schooling.

For most lone parents, their Income Support claim started after their previous job, which was typically full-time. Many of these lone parents held their job for a year or more, indicating a significant experience of work.

Whether or not they worked full-time, the majority of lone parents used some form of childcare. The most common arrangement was childcare provided by relatives, friends, or partners.

4 Working Lone Parents

This chapter focuses on the lone parents who identified themselves as working at the time of the survey. This is a fairly small group, about one in ten of the postal survey respondents.

4.1 Number of Hours Worked per Week

By the time of the postal survey, some of the lone parents selected from benefit records had ceased to claim Income Support, as they were working 16 hours per week or more. Of those in work, two in five (42 per cent) were working full-time when they returned the questionnaire. A majority (59 per cent) were thus working to an extent which allowed them to continue to receive Income Support. A quarter of the lone parents (27 per cent) were working up to five hours per week, a type of work described as ‘mini jobs’, and shown by longitudinal data to be transitional between not working at all and taking up work for enough hours to cease claiming out-of-work benefits (Iacovou and Berthoud, 2000).

Table 4.1.1 Current working status by hours worked

Hours per week in current job	Lone parents currently in a paid job		
	Working and worked in past %	Current work is first or only work experience %	Total %
5 hours or less	29	26	27
6 to 15 hours	31	32	32
16 to 29 hours	27	29	28
30 or more hours	13	14	14
Weighted base	1,750	2,277	4,027
Unweighted base	2,351	2,459	4,810

Base: All lone parents with current job

Table 4.1.1 shows that there was very little difference in patterns of working hours between those who had worked previously and those for whom their current job was their first period of work.

These two groups of lone parents also had broadly similar responses to a question about their hopes for work in the next 12 months (Table 4.1.2). A majority of all working parents (61 per cent) indicated that they hoped to be doing the same amount of work in the same job, and about one in six (18 per cent) hoped to be able to work more hours per week in the same job. Very few of them wanted to reduce their hours of work or to stop working. This implies that once they had started working, most lone parents wished to be able to continue working at the same level or to increase their work. Overall, one in six (17 per cent) said they would like to change to a different job. This was somewhat more common among those with work experience in the past (21 per cent) than those in their first job (15 per cent).

Table 4.1.2 Hopes about work in next 12 months by work status

Hopes about work in next 12 months	Work status		
	Working and worked in past %	Current work is only job %	Total %
Would like to keep same job and hours	57	65	61
Would like to work more hours in same job	20	17	18
Would like to work fewer hours in same job	2	2	2
Would like a different job	21	15	17
Would like to stop working	1	1	1
Weighted base	1,696	2,244	3,940
Unweighted base	2,284	2,426	4,710

Base: All lone parents with current job

Although over half of those currently working (58 per cent) had started in 2000 or 2001, one in five had been in work since 1997 or earlier (Table 4.1.3). This was less common among those whose current work was their only job.

Table 4.1.3 Year in which current job started by work status

When started current job	Work status		
	Working and worked in past %	Current work is only job %	Total %
1996 and before	18	12	15
1997	6	4	5
1998	9	9	9
1999	14	13	13
2000 and 2001	54	62	58
Weighted base	1,673	2,217	3,790
Unweighted base	2,253	2,290	4,543

Base: All lone parents with current job

The sample members who had started their job in 2000 or 2001 included both people who were doing part-time jobs, some with very few hours, and others (65 per cent) who were working full-time who might also have stopped claiming Income Support.¹⁷ On the other hand, the people who had long-standing jobs were predominantly working part-time (Table 4.1.4).

¹⁷ There are several reasons which might explain the fact that many lone parents reported working more than 16 hours per week. One possibility is that their working hours had changed recently, perhaps following the end of an IS claim. A second possibility is that the IS claim covered only part of the employment spell.

Table 4.1.4 Hours worked by when started current job

Hours per week in current job	Year in which started current job					Total %
	1996 or before %	1997 %	1998 %	1999 %	2000 or 2001 %	
5 hours or less	37	46	47	44	15	27
6 to 15 hours	50	42	42	46	21	32
16 to 29 hours	7	6	7	6	44	28
30 or more hours	6	6	3	3	21	14
Weighted base	548	181	345	496	2,188	4,027
Unweighted base	623	216	412	599	2,656	4,810

Base: All lone parents with current job

4.2 Childcare Arrangements while Working

The lone parents who were doing paid work were almost all using some type of childcare arrangement, and this was consistent irrespective of the hours they worked. Only 13 per cent did not report using any of the childcare methods tested in the survey (Table 4.2.1).

Table 4.2.1 Childcare arrangements by hours worked

Whether used childcare	Hours worked in current job				Total %
	Under 5 hours %	6 to 15 hours %	16 to 29 hours %	30 hours or more %	
Any type of childcare used	85	85	91	91	88
No childcare used	15	15	9	10	13
Weighted base	1,092	1,275	1,113	547	4,027
Unweighted base	1,137	1,511	1,428	734	4,810

Base: All lone parents with current job

Two in five of these lone parents were able to use a nursery, crèche, playgroup or school as a means of caring for their child. About two in three used informal help provided by a relative, friend or their partner. Both of these methods varied little according to the hours worked. The childcare arrangements which were used mainly by those working a greater number of hours were after school or holiday playschemes and childminders or similar arrangements (Table 4.2.2).

Table 4.2.2 Childcare arrangements by hours worked

Types of childcare	Hours worked in current job				Total %
	Under 5 hours %	6 to 15 hours %	16 to 29 hours %	30 hours or more %	
Relatives, friends or partner	65	64	76	70	68
Nursery, crèche, playgroup or school	42	47	35	33	40
Childminder, au pair or Nanny	2	2	8	15	6
Work at home	3	3	3	7	4
After school or holiday playscheme	3	4	6	9	5
Weighted base	932	1,090	1,015	494	3,531
Unweighted base	980	1,308	1,305	674	4,267

Base: All lone parents with current job

4.3 Conclusions

Of the lone parents working at the time of the survey, the majority were in part-time jobs. Most of them saw their current position continuing, although a considerable minority wished either to increase their hours or move to a different job. Over two in five were working full-time, and appeared likely to have stopped claiming Income Support.

The information given by lone parents about childcare suggests that almost all those in work had established some arrangements, most often involving relatives and friends. Where formal provision was used, it tended to be in the form of nurseries, playgroups and school. It is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the level of unmet demand for childcare from these data alone or to comment fully on the extent to which problems of access to childcare may inhibit moves to work. These will be explored a little further in Chapter 6.

5 Non-Working Lone Parents

Nine out of ten lone parents were not working at the time of the survey.¹⁸ A key aim with this group was to differentiate the people who appeared to be close to work from those who were more remote. This involved asking what they were doing to find a job, when they hoped to start work and for how many hours per week. Activities which might be used as 'work preparation' were also explored, including unpaid work and training or education.

5.1 Current Activities

The activities tested in the postal questionnaire which might be used as work preparation were voluntary work, training courses, job search and 'other activities'. Table 5.1.1 shows a striking relationship between the activities in which lone parents were engaged and their intention regarding when they might start paid work. Overall, only one lone parent in three (37 per cent) was doing any of these work preparation activities. However, this was strongly influenced by the situation of those lone parents who felt work was not an option for them in the next three years, of whom only one in four (23 per cent) reported doing any of these activities. Among those who hoped to start work in the next six months, more than four in five (83 per cent) were doing at least one of the work preparation activities listed.

Table 5.1.1 Whether any work preparation activity by when hope to start job

Whether any work preparation activity	When hope to be able to start a paid job					Total %
	In next 6 months %	Not in 6 months but next 12 months %	Not in next year but next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %	
Any activity	83	52	33	34	23	37
No activity	17	49	67	67	77	63
Weighted base	2,594	4,637	6,463	827	11,534	26,055
Unweighted base	2,968	4,729	6,203	783	10,644	25,327

Base: All lone parents who were not working at time of survey

Those unsure when they might start work (an additional code assigned in the office, based on information written on the questionnaire) were similar to those who ticked the box saying they hoped to start work in the next three years, but not in the next year. One in three of the lone parents in both of these groups was active in one or more of the ways indicated.

¹⁸ It is worth drawing attention to the difference between the Income Support claimants from whom the survey sample was drawn and the population of lone parents in general. Among the latter, according to the 1997 Labour Force Survey, only just over half (54%) were not in work.

The extent to which participation in work preparation activities was related to the intended start date of a job can be seen more clearly in Table 5.1.2. This shows that those intending to start work in the next six months were much more involved in job search than their counterparts who hoped to start work further in the future. This is what produced the marked difference seen in Table 5.1.1. Indeed, only three per cent of those for whom work was not an option in the next three years were engaged in job search.

Table 5.1.2 Current activity by when hope to start job

Current activity	When hope to be able to start a paid job					Total %
	In next 6 months %	Not in 6 months but in next 12 months %	Not in next year but in next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %	
Doing voluntary work	7	6	6	4	4	5
Studying or training	12	16	19	9	8	13
Looking for paid work	79	40	12	23	3	23
Doing something else	11	17	21	25	23	20
None of these	10	33	52	50	67	48
Weighted base	4,554	6,777	8,377	1,111	13,411	34,230
Unweighted base	5,201	6,894	8,074	1,064	12,442	33,675

Base: All lone parents who were not working at time of survey

The proximity of lone parents to starting a job was strongly related to their past experience of work. Table 5.1.3 shows that one in three (35 per cent) of those with previous work experience expected to start work in the next 12 months, compared with only one in four (23 per cent) of those with no past work experience. Almost half (49 per cent) of those with no past work experience envisaged that they could start work within the next three years. On the other hand, of those in the much larger group who had worked in the past, three in five (63 per cent) said they hoped to start working in the next three years.

Many of the lone parents who hoped to work in the next three years appeared to have only a vague idea about the nature of the work they might do. For instance, 25 per cent of those hoping to work in the next six months had not yet decided how many hours to work or reported that this depended on the job. This proportion increases as the planned employment becomes more distant (Table 5.1.4).

Overall, half (51 per cent) of those hoping to work in the next three years wished to work less than 30 hours per week. Slightly more than one in ten said they would prefer to work fewer than 16 hours or more than 30 hours per week (12 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively). It is clear, therefore, that most lone parents did not wish to work a five day week with 'normal' nine to five hours. It may be noted that working 16 or more hours would qualify lone parents for Working Families Tax Credit and entitle them to other in-work benefits, such as Housing Benefit, according to their situation. The postal survey did not probe

how many people chose these hours because of the availability of in-work benefits, but this is an issue to be explored in the face to face survey in Autumn 2001.

Table 5.1.3 When hope to start work by past work experience

When hope to start paid work	Past work experience		Total %
	Worked in past %	No previous work experience %	
Next 6 months	14	8	13
Not 6 months but in next year	21	15	20
Not next year but next 3 years	25	21	24
In next 3 years, but unsure when	3	5	4
Not in next 3 years	37	51	40
Weighted base	28,632	7,324	35,956
Unweighted base	28,848	6,446	35,294

Base: All lone parents not working at time of the survey

Table 5.1.4 Hours of work preferred by when hope to start paid work

Hours of work preferred	When hope to be able to start a paid work				Total %
	Next 6 months %	Next 12 months %	In next 3 years %	Next 3 years, don't know when %	
Under 15 hours	12	13	10	14	12
16 to 29 hours	47	41	35	21	39
30 or more hours	16	9	10	9	11
Depends on the job	17	18	19	20	18
Not decided yet	8	18	27	35	20
Weighted base	4,570	7,056	8,766	793	21,186
Unweighted base	5,213	7,162	8,429	771	21,575

Base: All lone parents not working at time of the survey who hoped to start work in the next three years

5.2 Job Search Activity and Hopes for Future Work

As would be expected, the extent of job search activity was closely associated with when lone parents hoped to start work. In order to be able to distinguish different forms of job search, activity in the last four weeks was probed, although respondents were also permitted to indicate that they were looking for work but had not used any of the identified methods of job search in that time. Very few respondents used this answer option, indicating that most of those actively looking for work had used at least one of the job search methods specified in the questionnaire.

All but a small minority (7 per cent) of those who wished to start work in the next six months had used one or more forms of job search in the last four weeks

(Table 5.2.1). When the intended job was more than six months in the future, the extent of recent job search diminished sharply. A third of those wishing to start work in 6 to 12 months (34 per cent) and almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of those wishing to start 13 months to three years in the future had done no job search in the last four weeks (Table 5.2.1).

Table 5.2.1 Job search in last four weeks by when hope to start paid work

Job search activity in the last 4 weeks	When hope to be able to start a paid work				Total %
	Next 6 months %	Not in next 6 months, but in next 12 months %	Not in next 12 months, but in next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	
Any job search activity	92	65	36	37	55
Other job search in last 4 weeks	1	1	*	2	1
No job search	7	34	63	61	44
Weighted base	2,779	4,675	6,460	1,303	15,217
Unweighted base	3,224	4,759	6,224	1,243	15,450

Base: All lone parents not working at time of the survey who hoped to start work in the next three years.

Note: * means less than 0.5 per cent.

The types of job search used by lone parents were fairly consistent, although the prevalence of use diminished in line with the expected date of starting work. Among those expecting to start work within one to three years, the three most frequently used methods of job search were looking at adverts in the local paper (83 per cent), asking friends and relatives (50 per cent) and visiting a Jobcentre (29 per cent) (Table 5.2.2).

Although these job search activities were also the most common among the lone parents who hoped to start work in the next six months, this group is also notable for the extent to which it had undertaken more active job search. Over half of them (59 per cent) had visited a Jobcentre. More than a third (38 per cent) had submitted job applications; a quarter (26 per cent) had approached employers to inquire about work and 14 per cent of them had made inquiries at private agencies.

Table 5.2.2 Job search in last four weeks by when hope to start paid job

Types of job search used in last 4 weeks	When hope to be able to start a paid job				Total %
	Next 6 months %	Not in next 6 months, but in next 12 months %	Not in next 12 months, but in next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	
Looked at job adverts in paper	91	87	83	(77)	87
Inquired at private agency	14	6	3	(9)	8
Visited Jobcentre	59	42	29	(48)	44
Used Internet to look for work	11	8	7	(7)	9
Asked friends and relatives	71	61	50	(55)	61
Approached employers directly	26	13	7	(17)	16
Applied for a job	38	15	10	(19)	21
Weighted base	4,313	4,870	3,428	485	13,096
Unweighted base	4,857	4,859	3,202	462	13,380

Base: All lone parents not working at time of the survey who hoped to start work in the next three years.

Note: Those coded as 'next three years, don't know when', were not routed to further questions, and this resulted in some missing data on job search methods. As a result figures are qualified and given in brackets

5.3 Conclusions

Of the lone parents not currently working, just over half said they hoped to start work in the next three years, while the remainder felt it was not an option for them in this time period. However, among those who wanted a job, the extent of their effort was variable. It is significant that most of the activity consisted of job search by those who hoped to start work in the next six months. Relatively few lone parents were involved in training or voluntary work. The job search activity was also predominantly 'passive' (but not necessarily ineffective), based on asking friends, looking in the local newspapers and visiting the Jobcentre.

The fact that much of this activity was concentrated among those who hoped to start work within the next six months is perfectly logical. Most job vacancies require an applicant to start within a matter of weeks, and hence it is not necessarily beneficial for a person to make an appreciable effort to look for work when he or she will not be ready to start work for some time. There is evidence that a fairly large group of lone parents were thinking seriously about work and had started to make preparations, mainly in the form of starting to become informed about the types of job vacancies available. Even among those whose situation meant they did not think work was an option for them in the next 12 months, but who wanted to start working in the next three years, over four fifths reported looking at job vacancies in the local newspapers.

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6 Attitudes and Barriers to Work and Training

The topics discussed in this chapter are about the attitudes of lone parents towards moving into work or study, whether independently or with the help of a New Deal for Lone Parents Personal Adviser. The information collected shows some potential as a means of identifying lone parents who have a higher propensity to move into work in the foreseeable future, and those who for one reason or another cannot see this as a possibility. This information will be used in the construction of a propensity score for matching participants and non-participants in the next stage of the study.

Lone parents' responses to four different questions are analysed in this chapter. First, ten different 'barriers' to employment and training were tested. These included a perceived lack of suitable childcare in the area or reluctance to leave their children with others; having a health condition or disability; the belief that they would be worse off in work; and not having the right skills or experience. Second, each parent was asked whether they would be willing to work for the minimum wage, which acts as a proxy for some financial barriers to work. Thirdly, lone parents were presented with nine attitude statements and asked their level of agreement with them. Their responses have been aggregated into a 'commitment-to-work' scale. Finally, responses to a question about involvement and interest in training were gathered. Taken together, these measures of amenability to work will be a valuable tool in the next stage of research.

6.1 Barriers to Work and Training

In asking questions about ten potential barriers to work, the aim was to help identify those lone parents for whom work did not seem a possibility in the immediate future. In this section, responses from different sub-groups of lone parents are examined.

The barriers covered a range of aspects, but may be grouped as follows:

Aspects of the local area:

- "There isn't enough suitable, affordable child-care around here"
- "There aren't enough jobs around here"
- "There aren't enough training opportunities around here"

Problems with employers and jobs

- "An employer is unlikely to give me a job because of my childcare responsibilities"
- "I would be worse off financially if I started to work or study"

Constraints on the lone parent's ability to work

- "I don't want to leave my child with anyone else"

- "I have a health problem or disability"
- "I haven't got enough skills or experience to find the right job"
- "My confidence about work or study is low"
- "I care for someone who has a health condition, disability or behavioural difficulties."

Some of the barriers tested could prove potentially prohibitive to securing long-term paid employment. For instance, lone parents with a disability or their responsibility to care for someone with a disability may be very difficult to overcome. These were the two least commonly mentioned barriers, ticked by 23 per cent and 17 per cent of respondents, respectively (Table 6.1.1).

The most commonly-mentioned barriers were a reluctance to leave their children with anyone else (55 per cent) and a lack of affordable child-care (52 per cent). Other factors cited by half of the lone parents queried were the belief that they lacked skills or experience (51 per cent) and that they would be worse off financially in paid work (50 per cent). These commonly-mentioned barriers tap a broad range of factors, including the relationship between parent and child, an aspect of the local situation (childcare), low levels of confidence, and the perceived value of work.

Table 6.1.1 shows a breakdown of the responses in terms of when each lone parent hoped to work. The results suggest that the relationship between barriers and proximity to the labour market is rather complex.

Table 6.1.1 Barriers to work by when hope to start job

Barriers to work	When hope to be able to start a paid job					Total %
	Next 6 months %	Next 12 months %	In next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %	
Lack of suitable childcare in area	55	56	57	38	46	52
Don't want to leave my child with anyone else	37	50	61	50	60	55
I have a health condition or disability	12	15	15	38	35	23
I would be worse off financially in a job or studying	43	50	55	39	51	50
There aren't enough jobs around here	48	40	35	34	34	37
There aren't enough training opportunities around here	31	27	24	21	23	25
I haven't got skills or experience to find the right job	53	54	54	48	48	51
My confidence about work and study is low	47	49	47	41	43	46
Employers won't employ me because of my childcare responsibilities	44	46	48	33	46	46
I care for someone who has health or behaviour problems	10	12	14	18	23	17
Weighted base	4,382	6,779	8,460	13,690	1,135	34,447
Unweighted base	4,961	6,868	8,102	12,715	1,096	33,742

Base: All lone parents not working at time of the survey

Those people who said work was not an option for them in the next three years were appreciably more likely to mention health-related barriers. Reluctance to leave a child with anyone else also shows the expected pattern. Over one in three (37 per cent) of those who hoped to start work in the next six months reported this barrier, compared with 60 per cent of those who felt work was not an option in the next three years. Concern about being worse off in work also showed a variation from two-fifths (43 per cent) of those hoping to start work in the next six months to over half (55 per cent) of those who hoped to start working within the next three years, but not in the next year. It is interesting to see that slightly fewer (51 per cent) of those who said work was not an option for them in the next three years mentioned that they felt they would be worse off in work.

Lack of affordable childcare showed a slight variation, but with those hoping to work in the near future somewhat more likely to mention this than those who did not see work as an option for them in the next three years. This suggests that lack of suitable and affordable childcare was a common feature of the places in which lone parents lived and that those who were actively considering work were slightly more aware of this constraint than those not thinking about work¹⁹.

¹⁹ An alternative interpretation is that those with fewer childcare constraints were more able to move into work, leaving those who face significant barriers to 'accumulate' within the system.

The same pattern can be seen even more strongly in the case of perceptions of the availability of jobs and training, where those 'closer' to the labour market were more likely to report such constraints than those who did not see work as a prospect for them in the next three years.

What emerges from this is a preliminary set of findings about what such barriers mean to lone parents:

- A substantial proportion of lone parents do face fairly prohibitive barriers such as their own ill health or that of someone they care for, with some of those hoping to work in the next 6 months reporting such problems (22 per cent).
- Very many lone parents, again including many of those who hoped to work in the next six months, were concerned about whether they would be better off financially in work: this group represents a significant opportunity for the New Deal for Lone Parents to offer information and help applying for in-work benefits.
- A lack of childcare varied slightly according to when lone parents hoped to work. It would act as a constraint if the lone parent intended to use formal childcare. Given that lone parents would only be eligible for financial assistance through Childcare Tax Credit if they used registered childcare, its availability and affordability are certainly relevant.
- Those who hoped to work in the near future were more aware of a lack of job vacancies, but this did not seem to deter them from hoping to obtain paid work.

A general conclusion from these points is that perceptions of barriers are complex:

- Those hoping to work in the near future were very likely to mention some barriers, so proximity to the labour market may be as much to do with being able to cope in spite of barriers, rather than the point of transition into work being due to some change in circumstances which 'removes' barriers to work.
- A programme such as NDLP may be able to improve the information available to inform choices by lone parents and, perhaps equally important, perceptions about in-work benefits, childcare and confidence about work.

To explore further the implications of barriers for proximity to the labour market, the number of these barriers which lone parents reported are explored based on the current working status of the lone parents, as described in Chapter 3.

The result of this analysis (Table 6.1.2), shows a relationship between fewer barriers and being in paid work at the time of the survey, as well as between having a greater number of barriers and a lack of work experience. Overall, half (51 per cent) of the lone parents identified four barriers or more. However, even

among those currently in work, nearly one in three (31 per cent) faced four or more barriers, indicating that some lone parents managed to work in spite of these difficulties.

Table 6.1.2 Number of barriers to work by current working status

Number of barriers identified	Work experience			Total %
	Currently working %	Not working/ worked in past %	No work experience %	
None	17	5	7	7
One	19	14	12	14
Two	19	14	11	14
Three	14	15	12	15
Four	12	16	13	15
Five	9	13	13	13
Six	6	11	13	11
Seven to Ten	4	12	19	12
Weighted base	4,162	28,790	7,366	40,319
Unweighted base	4,975	29,001	6,488	40,464

Base: All lone parents

In order to determine whether the types of barriers differed by work status, barriers were examined among those currently in work versus those who had worked in the past and those who had never worked. Table 6.1.3 indicates that lone parents currently in work were less likely to cite the following barriers: a lack of confidence or skills, worry about leaving their child with someone else, worry that employers wouldn't hire them due to their childcare responsibilities, and a health condition or disability.

Table 6.1.3 Barriers to work by current working status

Perceived barriers to work	Work Status			Total %
	Currently working %	Not working/ worked in past %	No work experience %	
Lack of suitable childcare in area	45	52	48	51
Don't want to leave my child with anyone else	44	53	61	54
I have a health condition or disability	10	22	28	22
I would be worse off financially in a job or studying	39	52	45	49
There aren't enough jobs around here	30	36	40	36
There aren't enough training opportunities around here	24	24	29	25
I haven't got skills or experience to find the right job	40	48	65	50
My confidence about work and study is low	34	43	55	45
Employers won't employ me because of my childcare responsibilities	31	45	48	44
I care for someone who has health or behaviour problems	12	16	19	16
Weighted base	3,459	27,397	6,821	37,676
Unweighted base	4,094	27,533	6,005	37,632

This point is reinforced by Table 6.1.4, which shows the number of barriers faced with a breakdown by the time when lone parents not currently working would hope to start work. As with lone parents currently working, those lone parents who hoped to start work in the near future were by no means immune from the effects of barriers, and indeed they reported a similar number of barriers (e.g. 51 per cent mentioned four or more) to those reported by the lone parents who felt that work was not an option in the next three years (of whom 53 per cent mentioned four barriers or more).

Table 6.1.4 Number of barriers to work by when hope to start job

Number of barriers identified	When hope to be able to start a paid job					Total %
	Next 6 months %	Next 12 months %	In next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %	
None	6	5	5	10	4	5
One	11	10	10	19	16	13
Two	16	14	14	13	13	14
Three	16	17	16	15	13	15
Four	18	17	16	11	13	15
Five	15	15	14	11	12	13
Six	10	11	13	10	11	11
Seven to Ten	8	11	13	12	17	14
Weighted base	4,035	6,260	7,838	1,014	12,544	31,690
Unweighted base	4,636	6,416	7,558	967	11,644	31,221

Base: All lone parents not working at time of the survey

Clearly, some barriers inhibited movement into work for some lone parents, so the rest of this section looks at the patterns of barriers mentioned by key groups of lone parents.

Table 6.1.5 starts by examining the percentage of lone parents who mentioned each barrier with a breakdown by sex. The differences in the barriers experienced between male and female lone parents were not substantial, and their different age profiles means that what may appear to be differences by sex may reflect the greater average age of male lone parents. This interpretation appears likely to account to some extent for the lower incidence of childcare problems and the greater incidence of health problems.

Table 6.1.5 Barriers to work by sex of lone parents

Barriers to work	Sex		Total %
	Women %	Men %	
Lack of suitable childcare in area	52	40	51
Don't want to leave my child with anyone else	55	45	54
I have a health condition or disability	22	35	22
I would be worse off financially in a job or studying	50	41	49
There aren't enough jobs around here	36	43	36
There aren't enough training opportunities around here	25	26	25
I haven't got skills or experience to find the right job	51	42	50
My confidence about work and study is low	45	37	45
Employers won't employ me because of my childcare responsibilities	44	46	44
I care for someone who has health or behaviour problems	16	19	16
Weighted base	36,489	2,400	38,889
Unweighted base	36,608	2,156	38,764

Base: All lone parents

Table 6.1.6 shows a complicated pattern of barriers related to the age of the lone parent's youngest child. Those in the three groups with a youngest child aged up to eleven appeared to experience a similar degree of difficulty in the availability of childcare and employers' attitudes. Only for those whose youngest child was aged 11 or over did these problems diminish, although about a quarter still reported problems with arranging childcare.

Reluctance to leave the child(ren) with anyone else was also widespread, even when the youngest child was aged 11 or over. The capacity of the local labour market and availability of training were, as one would expect, not apparently related to the age of the youngest child, nor was the level of concern about being worse off in work or study.

Some other factors appeared to be age-related, in this case to the lone parent's age. For example, those lone parents with older children were much more likely to report that they had a health problem or disability and they were also more likely to have caring responsibility. Age of the youngest child was not related to the lone parent's perception of having skills and experience suited to the right job.

Table 6.1.6 Barriers to work by age of youngest child

Barriers to work	Age of youngest child				Total %
	Under 3 years %	3 to 5 years %	5 to 11 years %	11 to 18 years %	
Lack of suitable childcare in area	62	61	51	24	51
Don't want to leave my child with anyone else	62	59	56	34	54
I have a health condition or disability	13	15	23	43	22
I would be worse off financially in a job or studying	51	52	50	43	49
There aren't enough jobs around here	36	36	37	37	36
There aren't enough training opportunities around here	27	27	24	23	25
I haven't got skills or experience to find the right job	50	50	50	51	50
My confidence about work and study is low	40	45	46	49	45
Employers won't employ me because of my childcare responsibilities	49	51	47	27	44
I care for someone who has health or behaviour problems	10	14	20	22	16
Weighted base	11,540	6,781	12,999	7,456	38,776
Unweighted base	11,675	7,069	13,612	6,270	38,626

Base: All lone parents.

The duration of the Income Support claim was often a direct reflection of the effect of barriers to work. Table 6.1.7 shows an analysis of perceived barriers by claim duration bands. Four items appeared to be associated with very long claim duration's: being ill or disabled, caring for someone else, lacking skills and experience and low confidence about work and study. The first two barriers may explain in part the duration of the claim. The latter two barriers may be both cause and consequence of extended claim periods.

Table 6.1.7 Perceived barriers to work by duration of Income Support claim

Perceived barriers to work	Duration of current Income Support Claim				Total %
	Under 6 months %	6 months to under 24 months %	24 months to 5 years %	5 years and above %	
Lack of suitable childcare in area	54	55	54	45	51
Don't want to leave my child with anyone else	50	53	55	55	54
I have a health condition or disability	18	17	21	28	22
I would be worse off financially in a job or studying	45	49	51	49	49
There aren't enough jobs around here	36	36	36	37	36
There aren't enough training opportunities around here	27	26	25	24	25
I haven't got skills or experience to find the right job	45	46	49	55	50
My confidence about work and study is low	37	40	44	51	45
Employers won't employ me because of my childcare responsibilities	41	44	46	44	44
I care for someone who has health or behaviour problems	12	13	15	21	17
Weighted base	3,900	10,054	10,786	14,451	39,191
Unweighted base	9,657	10,783	8,608	9,998	39,046

Base: All lone parents.

6.2 Wage Expectations as a Barrier to Work

Wage expectations were measured by asking whether the lone parent would be willing to work for a wage equal to the national Minimum Wage, which was £3.60 per hour at the time of the survey (£3.20 for those aged 18-21). There was no space to ask about awareness of in-work benefits, which may be closely connected with lone parents' perception of the wage they need.

Table 6.2.1 Whether will work for the minimum wage by when hope to start job

Willing to work for Minimum Wage	When hope to be able to start a paid job					Total %
	Next 6 months %	Next 12 months %	In next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %	
Yes	47	43	37	35	30	37
No	54	57	63	65	70	64
Weighted base	4,356	6,670	8,272	1,014	12,879	33,191
Unweighted base	4,972	6,797	7,980	969	12,021	32,739

Base: All lone parents

Two in three (64 per cent) lone parents said they would not accept work at the Minimum Wage. However, there was a distinct variation based on proximity to

labour. Those wishing to work within six months, for instance, were far more likely (47 per cent) to accept a job at minimum wage than those for whom work was not an option in the next three years (30 per cent) (Table 6.2.1).

It is unclear how far these attitudes to wages reflect a lack of information about relative wage levels. The current minimum wage rate was stated in the questionnaire, however, it is unclear whether respondents had any information about current wages rates offered in the market. Interestingly, those who were currently working (46 per cent) were more often prepared to work at the minimum wage than those who were not working but had worked in the past (37 per cent) and those with no work experience (36 per cent) (Table 6.2.2).

Table 6.2.2 Whether will work for the minimum wage by work status

Willing to work for Minimum Wage	Work Status			Total %
	Currently working %	Not working/ worked in past %	No work experience %	
Yes	46	37	36	38
No	54	63	64	63
Weighted base	3,885	26,494	6,493	36,873
Unweighted base	4,660	26,838	5,726	37,224

Base: All lone parents

6.3 Attitudes to Work, Childcare and Parental Responsibilities

Respondents were asked to say how much they agreed or disagreed with a set of nine statements giving attitudes which had been expressed by other people (see Question 19 in the Appendix). These statements showed consistent patterns of responses in an earlier study, where they had been included among a much larger number of attitude statements (Bryson, *et al.*, 1999). As in the earlier study, answers were recorded on a five-point scale:²⁰

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree.

One general feature of answers needs to be noted at the outset. This is the relatively large percentage of respondents who chose the intermediate 'neither agree nor disagree' category of the attitude scale. Experience of other studies suggests that respondents use this category when they do not feel particularly strongly about the issue which the question addresses. This interpretation is reinforced by the relatively large percentages of respondents who chose the

²⁰ Unlike the Bryson *et al.* study, these factors have been combined in a single scale for the purposes of this analysis. The attitudinal data will be explored further in later stages of the study.

‘agree’ and ‘disagree’ answers, rather than the answers at either end of the scale. Alternatively, it could be that lone parents lack confidence about their opinions on such matters, in which case variations in response patterns might vary by levels of education and work experience.

As an example of the way some of the attitudinal questions were answered, responses can be examined for the first statement:

“A person must have a job to feel a full member of society”

In Table 6.3.1, the responses have been simplified to ‘agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’ and ‘disagree.’ The percentage of respondents who did not answer the question also appears. It can be seen that one respondent in three (approximately 33 per cent) gave the intermediate answer across all the categories of claim duration. Slightly more than one in three (approximately 35 per cent) said they disagree with the statement.

It appears that the question was tapping deeply-held beliefs about the role of work, and this varied only to a small extent with duration of claim. It may be that the question also engaged with lone parents’ feelings about the circumstances in which they ceased to work and their sense of whether their position had affected their connection with society in general.

Table 6.3.1 “A person must have a job ...” by duration of Income Support claim

“A person must have a job to feel a full member of society”	Duration of Income Support claim							Total %
	Under 6 months %	6 to under 12 months %	12 to under 24 months %	24 to under 36 months %	3 to 5 years %	5 to 9 years %	9 years and over %	
Agree	31	28	28	27	27	28	27	28
Neither	31	32	32	35	33	33	34	33
Disagree	34	36	37	35	36	35	32	35
Not Stated	3	3	4	4	4	5	6	4
Weighted base	4,283	4,090	6,740	4,998	6,607	8,500	7,055	42,273
Unweighted base	10,619	4,994	6,628	4,644	4,618	5,882	4,888	42,273

Base: All lone parents

In order to put the responses to the series of attitudinal statements into their most general form, they have been combined in a summary scale. The following steps were taken to aggregate the statements into an interpretable form. In particular, all questions were coded such that agreement indicates commitment to work and disagreement indicates reluctance.

- Set values outside the range 1 to 5 to ‘system missing’ (i.e. ignore those cases)
- Recode the values in the opposite order for statements 19d, 19f, 19g, 19h and 19i (text of which appears below), where it was established empirically

that people closer to the labour market tended to disagree with the statement

- Sum the values resulting from the above and divide by 9
- Inspect the distribution of values and divide the population into five groups of approximately similar size.

The statements included in this summary variable appear below:

- 19a *A person must have a job to feel a full member of society.*
 19b *A woman and her family will benefit if she has a paid job.*
 19c *Once you've got a job, it's important to hang on to it, even if you don't really like it.*
 19d *If I didn't have a job, I'd pack it in, even if I had no other job to go to.*
 19e *Having almost any job is better than being unemployed.*
 19f *If their child is ill, and both parents work, the mother should take time off work.*
 19g *It is less important for a woman to go out to work than for a man.*
 19h *Women with school-aged children should never work full-time.*
 19i *It is just wrong for a woman with children under five to go out to work.*

The result of this combined scale of attitudes can be seen in Table 6.3.2, where the distribution of values is shown for three groups based on the work status of lone parents. There is a considerable contrast between those who have never worked and those lone parents currently working who did not have previous work experience. Those who are currently working are more likely to agree with the statements in the scale, while those with no work experience are less likely. This suggests that responses to the commitment-to-work statements will be effective in discriminating between lone parents on the basis of their proximity to work.

Table 6.3.2 Commitment-to-Work scale by current working status

Commitment-to-work scale	Work status			Total %
	Currently working %	Not working/ worked in past %	No work experience %	
Tending to agree more strongly	31	18	13	19
Tending to agree	26	22	19	22
Tending towards an intermediate value	17	18	18	18
Tending to disagree	17	22	24	22
Tending to disagree more strongly	10	20	26	20
Weighted base	4,162	28,790	7,366	40,319
Unweighted base	4,975	29,001	6,488	40,464

Base: All lone parents

As a more direct measure of proximity to work, a similar analysis among those not working at the time of the survey (about 90 per cent of the respondents) can be conducted. A straightforward relationship appears in Table 6.3.3, with

attitudes tending towards ‘work commitment’ associated with an intention to start work in the foreseeable future.

Table 6.3.3 Commitment-to-work scale by when hope to start a job

Commitment-to-work scale	When hope to be able to start a paid job					Total %
	Next 6 months %	Next 12 months %	Not next year, but in next 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %	
Tending to agree more strongly	33	22	15	17	11	17
Tending to agree	26	26	22	18	17	21
Tending towards an intermediate value	17	19	20	18	18	18
Tending to disagree	16	21	23	23	25	22
Tending to disagree more strongly	8	13	20	24	30	21
Weighted base	4,679	7,194	8,955	1,303	14,477	36,607
Unweighted base	5,329	7,292	8,602	1,243	13,422	35,888

Base: All lone parents not working at the time of the survey

As an illustration of the potential use of the composite attitude score, three groups identified in earlier qualitative research (Cragg, Ross, Dawson, 2000) as having distinctive situations in relation to the help offered by NDLP are given closer inspection. They are lone fathers, those (mainly women) who became parents in their teens and members of ethnic minority groups.

Table 6.3.4 looks at the responses on the commitment-to-work scale given by male and female lone parents. The differences were not substantial, although they suggest that men have a slightly higher commitment to work. Nevertheless, just over one in three (35 per cent) male lone parents expressed overall disagreement, indicating potentially greater barriers to be overcome in making a transition to work. This is a group which may warrant further investigation.

Table 6.3.4 Commitment-to-work scale by sex of lone parents

Commitment-to-work scale	Sex		Total %
	Women %	Men %	
Tending to agree more strongly	18	23	19
Tending to agree	22	24	22
Tending towards an intermediate value	18	19	18
Tending to disagree	22	20	22
Tending to disagree more strongly	20	15	20
Weighted base	39,284	2,632	41,916
Unweighted base	39,579	2,362	41,941

Base: All lone parents

The qualitative research also identified a distinctive situation among mothers who became lone parents as teenagers. They appeared to be less motivated by

the financial rewards of working but wished to improve their position generally and were looking for help to make changes. Table 6.3.5 looks at the commitment-to-work scale with a breakdown by the age of the parent (mostly mothers) at the time of the oldest resident child's birth. As noted previously, the 'age at first birth' derived in this way may be less reliable for those appearing to have been in older age groups at the time of their first child's birth.

This analysis supports the view that those lone parents whose first child was born in their teens have a set of attitudes which indicate a commitment to work. However, they are accompanied by a considerable sub-group whose attitudes appear to reflect circumstances which may make it difficult to make the transition to work. It will be of interest to see how far this is related to a desire to seek assistance or advice (Chapter 7).

Table 6.3.5 Commitment-to-work scale by approximate age at first child's birth

Commitment-to-work scale	Approximate age at birth of first child					Total %
	12-15 %	16-19 %	20-24 %	25-34 %	35 or over %	
Tending to agree more strongly	22	21	19	17	13	19
Tending to agree	25	23	22	21	18	22
Tending towards an intermediate value	16	18	19	18	18	18
Tending to disagree	22	21	22	23	25	22
Tending to disagree more strongly	16	18	19	21	25	20
Weighted base	345	10,009	13,500	10,601	2,333	36,786
Unweighted base	347	9,556	13,600	11,072	2,354	36,929

Base: All lone parents

The patterns can also be examined in terms of broad ethnic groups (Table 6.3.6). Here the qualitative research highlighted the position of women from Pakistan and Bangladesh, some of whom had language difficulties, health problems or a lack of qualifications. At the same time, they were generally subject to cultural expectations surrounding work. It is clear from the analysis that Asian lone parents were somewhat less likely to have responded to the attitude statements in a way which suggested a commitment to working. Indeed, a relatively large proportion of them expressed views which may be indicative of barriers of various types. On the other hand, it appeared Black lone parents were likely to be closer to work than other lone parents in general.

Table 6.3.6 Commitment-to-work scale by ethnic group of lone parents

Commitment-to-work scale	Ethnic group				Total %
	White %	Black %	Asian %	Mixed/ other %	
Tending to agree more strongly	19	25	12	18	19
Tending to agree	22	23	20	23	22
Tending towards an intermediate value	18	18	18	19	18
Tending to disagree	22	19	25	21	22
Tending to disagree more strongly	20	14	25	20	20
Weighted base	32,172	1,634	1,147	1,128	36,081
Unweighted base	32,235	1,721	1,216	1,129	36,301

Base: All lone parents

6.4 Interest in Training

All lone parents were asked about their experiences or expectations about training. A small minority of lone parents were involved in studying or training at the time of the postal survey (12 per cent). For those who were not studying, interest in training in the future was measured in terms of proximity to starting a course. One in five (21 per cent) lone parents expressed an interest in starting a course in the next year and a similar group (23 per cent) thought they would do so in the next two or three years. Nearly half said they were not interested in studying or training (44 per cent).

Table 6.4.1 Interest in training by when hopes to start work

Interest in training	When hope to be able to start a paid job					Total %
	Next 6 months %	Next 12 months %	In next 3 years			
Not next year, but in next 3 years %			Not next year, but in next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %		
Studying or training at time of survey	14	16	17	10	7	12
Start a course in next 12 months	44	40	16	25	7	21
Start of course in next 2 or 3 years	11	15	37	15	23	23
Not interested in studying or training	32	30	29	50	63	44
Weighted base	4,261	6,693	8,454	963	13,413	33,784
Unweighted base	4,861	6,820	8,143	917	12,462	33,203

Base: All lone parents not working at the time of the survey

Table 6.4.1 is based on those not currently in work. It shows a clear relationship between interest in working and interest in training. Unsurprisingly, a majority of those for whom work was 'not an option in the next three years' were also not interested in training (63 per cent). The people most likely to be interested in starting a course (whether sooner or later) were those lone parents who hoped to start work at some time in the next three years.

These findings suggest that studying or training is seen as an activity linked to job prospects. However, it is striking that only 14 per cent of those interested in work in the next year were involved in training at the time of the survey, which may indicate some unmet demand for training. At the same time, the responses to this question show there is little interest in training among a third to half of those who hope to start a job in the next three years.

Table 6.4.2 Interest in training by qualification of lone parent

Interest in training	Types of qualifications held				Total %
	None %	Academic only %	Technical only %	Both academic and technical %	
Studying or training at time of survey	6	15	21	25	13
Start a course in next 12 months	17	24	26	25	21
Start of course in next 2 or 3 years	23	25	20	21	23
Not interested in studying or training	55	36	33	29	44
Weighted base	19,165	10,286	1,927	7,367	38,745
Unweighted base	18,087	10,698	2,007	8,061	38,853

Base:

One in four lone parents (25 per cent) with both academic and technical qualifications were studying at the time of the postal survey (Table 6.4.2). This compares with just 6 per cent of those with no qualifications. The majority of this group were not interested in future study (55 per cent). However, two-fifths of this group did express interest in training within the next three years, representing a fairly substantial group which NDLP Personal Advisers might be able to encourage to undertake training to improve their future employment prospects.

Table 6.4.3 Interest in training by age of lone parent

Interest in training	Age of lone parent				Total %
	Under 25 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-64 %	
Studying or training at time of survey	13	13	13	9	13
Start a course in next 12 months	24	22	19	15	21
Start of course in next 2 or 3 years	27	24	21	12	23
Not interested in studying or training	36	41	48	64	44
Weighted base	7,322	16,284	12,019	3,127	38,753
Unweighted base	7,253	16,516	12,138	2,953	38,860

Base:

A lack of interest in training was strongly related to age, increasing from just over one in three of those aged under 25 to almost two in three among those aged 45 and over. On the other hand, the predominant group are those aged 25 to 44, and a majority of this group are either training currently or interested in training in the future. Given the evidence elsewhere that work is not an imminent prospect for many of these lone parents, there seems to be a

substantial potential for advice and support to turn this latent interest into training that will act as work preparation.

6.5 Conclusions

Recognising that there is scope for more in-depth analysis of the information collected on attitudes and barriers to work, the data collected are very likely to be effective in providing a means of classifying lone parents in terms of their proximity to work and their likelihood of participating in the New Deal For Lone Parents.

It is salutary to note that being in work or wishing to move from benefit to work is not necessarily connected with an absence of barriers or with attitudes which show an over-riding attachment to the advantages of working. Many of the barriers do not affect lone parents simply at the point of transition.

It is also clear from this analysis that there are substantial numbers of lone parents for whom work is not a prospect in the short-term. The reasons why this is the case tend to be distinctive for each lone parent's situation. There are doubtless complex interactions between various types of barrier and the individual's attitudes and beliefs about work, childcare and parenting.

The lone parents with multiple barriers and whose attitudes reflect a remoteness from work are unlikely to feature in the subsequent quantitative research, which will focus attention on those who have participated in NDLP and on their counterparts who have not done so. Hence, when the data are finalised, it will be of value to exploit further the potential of the material from the postal survey which has been outlined in this chapter. It is likely to offer a range of insights into the circumstances of the entire eligible population for whom the programme was established.

7 Interest in Support to Find Work or Training

In addition to finding out about each individual's experience of work, and interest in returning to work, two more general questions were posed. The questionnaire asked how much contact each lone parent had had with services in the last three months, and their level of interest in support or advice for work- or training-related issues. These questions do not directly relate to proximity to work and may not be of value in identifying a matched sample of non-participants. Nevertheless, an understanding of lone parents' propensity to seek help and how they use existing services might aid an understanding of the take-up of the New Deal for Lone Parents and what the target group hope such a programme can offer.

7.1 Use of Services

All respondents were asked to identify whether they had contacted any of the people or services listed in Table 7.1.1 during the three months prior to completing the postal questionnaire. In interpreting this data, it is important to keep in mind that a number of factors could determine whether, or how often, a lone parent contacts a service. This might partly relate to how much help or contact with services they need. All lone parents are likely to need to contact the Benefits Agency intermittently, but individuals starting new claims or experiencing a change of circumstances will need to do so more often. Similarly, someone in debt might be more inclined to go the Citizen's Advice Bureau than others.

Differences in contact with services might also reflect each individual's personal preferences or their ability to access these services. Some lone parents may be inclined to resolve issues on their own, while others may be more likely to call on available services, or use alternative sources of support and advice (for example from other lone parents or from friends and family).

Even in the hypothetical situation that all lone parents needed the same help and had the same personal attributes that might encourage them to seek it out, there would still be differentials in the ease with which they could do so. The survey can help assess, for example, whether lone parents with no qualifications, or who have no phone, are less able to access services.

It is possible that there are some limitations in reporting some of this information. For example, it may be hard to remember whether a phone call, letter or visit fell within a specific time period. Or there may be a perception among some lone parents that they have 'constant' contact with the Benefits Agency which could lead to over reporting. Alternatively, lone parents may be inclined to show that they are seeking out help and are 'satisficing'²¹ rather than

²¹ 'Satisficing' is a term which has been used to describe a strategy of minimum effort in responding to survey questions. The behaviour involved is complicated, and may include giving

answering completely accurately. Even if there is some mis-reporting, the figures in the table below are strongly indicative of overall trends.

Setting these qualifications aside, about 45 per cent of lone parents reported having had contact with at least one of the people or services listed in Table 7.1.1, while the remainder did not report any contact. The most commonly contacted service was the Benefits Agency local office, which was mentioned by 27 per cent of all lone parents. This was followed by the Citizens' Advice Bureau which had been contacted by 13 per cent of lone parents, the Employment Service Jobcentre (11 per cent), NDLP and telephone advice lines (both contacted by eight per cent). Careers advisers and support groups for lone parents were less commonly used.

Table 7.1.1 Services used in last three months by sex

People or services used in last 3 months	Sex		All %
	Women %	Men %	
Citizens Advice Bureau	13	15	13
Careers Adviser	5	4	5
New Deal for Lone Parents	8	8	8
Employment Service Jobcentre	11	19	11
Benefits Agency local office	27	32	27
Support groups ¹	2	1	2
Telephoned an advice line	8	8	8
None of these in the last 3 months	55	49	55
Weighted base	36,958	2,427	39,385
Unweighted base	37,382	2,186	39,568

Base: All lone parents

¹The questionnaire mentioned 'groups such as Gingerbread, NACOPF or One Parent Scotland'

Table 7.1.1 shows that men were more likely to record use of some service or other (51 per cent of men compared to 45 per cent of women). Specifically, men were more likely to use an Employment Service Jobcentre (19 per cent compared to 11 per cent of women), which supports previous research findings that show that men are more inclined to use Jobcentres. Men were also slightly more likely to use the Benefits Agency local office (32 per cent compared to 27 per cent) and a Citizen's Advice Bureau (15 per cent compared to 13 per cent).

There appears to be very little difference in the type of help contacted in the past three months according to the age of the lone parent. Older lone parents were slightly more likely to have contacted the Citizens Advice Bureau and younger lone parents were more likely to have visited a careers adviser, Jobcentre or BA local office. However, these differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, there were some differences in the organisations approached by members of different ethnic groups but these were slight and difficult to interpret.

'acceptable' answers and not taking trouble to think what a question is really asking. In short, this may lead to incomplete or inaccurate answers (Krosnick, 1996).

The overall contact rates do, however, conceal important variations between those who have some qualifications and those with none. Table 7.1.2 shows that those who are better educated (particularly where they have both academic and technical qualifications) are consistently more likely to be in touch with various organisations. For example, contact with an NDLP Personal Adviser varied from 6 per cent among those with no qualifications to 13 per cent among those with both academic and technical qualifications.

Table 7.1.2 Services used in last three months by qualifications

People or services used in last 3 months	Types of qualifications held				Total %
	None %	Academic only %	Technical only %	Both academic and technical %	
Citizens Advice Bureau	11	14	13	16	13
Careers Adviser	2	6	7	8	5
New Deal for Lone Parents	6	10	11	13	8
Employment Service Jobcentre	9	12	15	15	11
Benefits Agency local office	22	31	28	35	27
Support groups ¹	1	2	2	3	2
Telephoned an advice line	6	9	9	11	8
None of these in the last 3 months	62	50	50	44	55
Weighted base	19,729	10,375	1,989	7,581	39,673
Unweighted base	18,650	10,817	2,070	8,304	39,841

Base: All lone parents

¹The questionnaire mentioned 'groups such as Gingerbread, NACOPF or One Parent Scotland'

Another factor which is likely to influence whether an individual makes use of available services is the presence of a telephone that they can use at home. Table 7.1.3 shows that the number of organisations contacted by individuals with a phone was consistently higher than for those without a phone. A potentially important finding is that only 6 per cent of lone parents without a phone had contacted the NDLP in the previous three months compared to 9 per cent of those who had a telephone at home. Multivariate analysis in the next stage of the research may show whether this difference can be accounted for by additional factors.

Table 7.1.3 Services used in last three months by use of a home phone

People or services used in last 3 months	Use of telephone		All %
	Yes %	No %	
Citizens Advice Bureau	13	11	13
Careers Adviser	5	3	5
New Deal for Lone Parents	9	6	8
Employment Service Jobcentre	12	10	11
Benefits Agency local office	29	22	27
Support groups ¹	2	1	2
Telephoned an advice line	8	6	8
None of these in the last 3 months	53	62	55
Weighted base	30,558	8,245	38,803
Unweighted base	31,354	7,662	39,016

Base: All lone parents

¹ For example Gingerbread, NACOPF or One Parent Scotland

Also striking is the relationship between services contacted and aspirations for future work. Among those who were not working at the time of the survey, those lone parents who hoped to start work in the next six months were more likely to report being in contact with all services except support groups, where the difference was minor. Those who hoped to start work in the next six months were over twice as likely (36 per cent) to have contacted a Jobcentre as those hoping to work within a year (16 per cent). Similarly the first of these groups was twice as likely as the second (19 per cent compared to ten per cent) to have contacted an NDLP Personal Adviser. It is also interesting to find that individuals hoping to work in the next six months were more likely to have contacted the Jobcentre than the Benefits Agency. This contrasts with the pattern among the population as a whole, among whom contact with the Benefits Agency is predominant (25 per cent).

Table 7.1.4 Services used in last three months by when hopes to work

People or services used in last 3 months	When hopes to start work					All %
	Next 6 months %	Next 12 months %	In next 3 years %	In next 3 years DK when %	Not in next 3 years %	
Citizens Advice Bureau	15	13	11	14	12	12
Careers Adviser	9	6	4	4	2	4
New Deal for Lone Parents	19	10	5	6	3	7
Employment Service Jobcentre	36	16	5	10	3	11
Benefits Agency local office	30	23	23	22	26	25
Support groups ¹	1	2	2	2	2	2
Telephoned an advice line	11	8	7	6	6	7
None of these in the last 3 months	35	54	62	59	63	57
Weighted base	4,447	6,813	8,489	1,109	13,620	34,478
Unweighted base	5,070	6,920	8,174	1,068	12,674	33,906

Base: All lone parents not currently in work

7.2 Interest in Services

Lone parents were also asked about what kind of services would be of interest to them. Respondents were asked to express an interest in as many of the items as they wanted, or to tick a box indicating that they would not be interested in any of the services listed.

The interpretation of answers is made difficult by the fact that two respondents in five did not tick any box. The assumption made about what this meant makes a considerable difference to the interpretation of the answers. Comparison of the number of items ticked against when the lone parent hopes to work reveals that the question was effectively ignored by many of the respondents who felt work was not an option for them in the next three years, and to a similar degree by those already in work. In other words, respondents were aware that the question was about their proximity to work, and reacted accordingly. As a result, the absence of a response has been treated as a 'not interested' answer.

Just over one quarter of the respondents were interested in some form of support or advice, with many expressing an interest in several of the items mentioned. Only the possibility of trying out a job as a short-term placement (which 17 per cent of the population wanted to do) was significantly less popular.

As Table 7.2.1 shows, women were slightly more likely than men to express an interest in most of the kinds of support and advice mentioned. The exceptions were practical ones – help finding or getting paid work and claiming in-work benefits, where men were equally interested. The broader tasks of thinking about or getting ready for work, or working out whether the lone parent would be better or worse off in work were more popular with women, as was the generally less attractive option of trying a job.

Table 7.2.1 Types of support or advice wanted by sex

Types of support or advice	Sex		
	Women %	Men %	All %
Find or apply for training/education	25	21	25
Thinking about getting ready for work	26	21	26
Find or get paid work	26	27	26
Try out a job (e.g. 2 week placement)	17	13	17
Stay in work once you have a job	25	21	25
Work out better/worse off in work	26	21	26
Claim in-work benefits	26	27	26
Not interested in any of these	74	75	74
Weighted base	39,284	2,632	41,916
Unweighted base	39,579	2,632	41,941

Base: All lone parents

Older lone parents were consistently less interested in the kinds of help and advice on offer from NDLP and, without exception, there is a strong gradient with interest in each type of support declining with age. Among the youngest group, almost one third were interested in each type of help compared to roughly one quarter of the population as a whole (Table 7.2.2).

Table 7.2.2 Types of support or advice wanted by age of lone parent

Types of support or advice	Age of lone parent				All %
	Under 25 %	25-34 %	35-44 %	45-64 %	
Find or apply for training/education	31	27	22	16	25
Thinking about getting ready for work	31	28	24	16	26
Find or get paid work	33	27	23	18	26
Try out a job (e.g. 2 week placement)	21	17	15	11	17
Stay in work once you have a job	31	27	22	16	25
Work out better/worse off in work	32	28	23	16	26
Claim in-work benefits	33	27	23	18	26
Not interested in any of these	69	73	77	81	74
Weighted base	7,696	17,587	13,343	3,647	42,272
Unweighted base	7,626	17,781	13,427	3,439	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Table 7.2.3 shows that lone parents with qualifications were more likely to be interested in help or advice than those with no qualifications. One interpretation of this pattern is that individuals who may have the greatest potential to benefit from support were the most reluctant to use services. An alternative explanation is that this group may have been the most discouraged about the potential for advice and support to change their situation.

Table 7.2.3 Types of support or advice wanted by qualifications

Types of support or advice	Types of qualifications held				Total %
	None %	Academic only %	Technical only %	Both academic and technical %	
Find or apply for training/education	20	30	28	30	25
Thinking about getting ready for work	22	30	29	32	26
Find or get paid work	23	28	31	32	26
Try out a job (e.g. 2 week placement)	14	18	21	21	17
Stay in work once you have a job	20	30	28	30	25
Claim in-work benefits	23	28	31	32	26
Not interested in any of these	78	71	72	70	74
Weighted base	21,637	10,761	2,084	7,791	42,273
Unweighted base	20,402	11,188	2,168	8,515	42,273

Base: All lone parents

Even more striking is the evidence that interest in different types of advice or support was dependent on an individual's aspirations for work (Table 7.2.4). Those who were very close to a possible start were clearly the group most interested in getting support, including almost two thirds who said they wanted help finding work (63 per cent) and claiming in-work benefits (also 63 per cent). Half of them (49 per cent) said they wanted a better off calculation. Among this group, the percentage interested in trying out a job was twice as great (37 per cent) as among respondents in general (17 per cent).

Although much less common, there was still some interest in seeking help among those who do not think that work was a realistic option for them within the next three years. For example, it may be noted that 15 per cent of this group were interested in help to find training, perhaps with the longer term expectation of easing their transition back to work, finding a better job or enhancing their current lives.

Table 7.2.4 Types of support or advice by when hopes to work

Types of support or advice	When hopes to work						Total %
	Works Now %	Within 6 months %	Within 12 months %	Within 3 years %	In next 3 years, don't know when %	Not an option in next 3 years %	
Find or apply for training/education	21	38	36	29	20	15	25
Thinking about getting ready for work	14	49	42	29	19	13	26
Find or get paid work	16	63	44	25	21	11	26
Try out a job (e.g. 2 week placement)	11	37	26	17	12	8	17
Stay in work once you have a job	21	38	36	29	20	15	25
Work out better/worse off in work	14	49	42	29	19	13	26
Claim in-work benefits	16	63	44	25	21	11	26
Not interested in any of these	79	63	64	71	76	84	74
Weighted base	4,162	4,679	7,194	8,955	1,303	14,477	40,770
Unweighted base	4,975	5,329	7,292	8,602	1,243	13,422	40,863

Base: All lone parents

7.3 Conclusions

In this section both access to services in the past three months and interest in future help or advice has been shown to vary considerably within the lone parent population. Use of services in the last quarter tended to be more common among men, the better educated, those with access to a home telephone, and those hoping to begin work in the short term.

Among the various services on offer from NDLP, most evoked interest among lone parents on benefit. The only service which consistently tested as less popular was trying out a job, for instance, on a two-week placement. Interest, however, was variable based on several factors. Women, younger lone parents, those with qualifications and respondents aspiring to work in the short term tended to express greater interest in the services examined.

One positive finding is that the interest in the services on offer from NDLP consistently outstrips the proportion of lone parents who contacted NDLP in the previous quarter. This suggests that there exists an untapped demand for support and advice, particularly among individuals as they approach the time when they are ready to start work.

8 Participation in the New Deal For Lone Parents

This section identifies individuals who participated in the New Deal for Lone Parents *after* returning the postal questionnaire and explains why this group is of particular interest (Section 8.1). It then describes some of the key socio-demographic characteristics of these participants compared with non-participants (Section 8.2). In the following section further differences are reported in terms of their activities and aspirations (Section 8.3). Also included is a brief, non-technical description of a multivariate analysis that seeks to identify key variables which explain the differences between participants and non-participants. Readers are referred to the technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming) for further details.

8.1 Identifying Participants in the New Deal for Lone Parents

The postal survey was carried out among lone parents who were believed to have not yet participated in the New Deal for Lone Parents. When drawing the sample, each individual's record was checked against the New Deal Evaluation Database. Those who were identified as having had a first interview with an NDLP Personal Adviser were excluded from the sample. Once the questionnaires were posted, every sample member was rechecked against monthly updates of the New Deal Evaluation Database, gradually identifying more and more lone parents who had participated since they had been sampled. By the cut off date, 2,996 lone parents were identified who had taken part in NDLP and had returned a completed questionnaire (a total of 6 per cent of postal survey respondents).²²

Of these 2,996 participants, 1,787 had taken part in the programme *after* returning their questionnaire (3.9 per cent of the postal survey respondents). This is a very important sub-group of participants, as these are individuals who reported their circumstances and attitudes *before* formally participating in the New Deal. This should minimise the extent to which their answers were affected by their contact with the programme.²³ This is the group described in this chapter.

It cannot be assumed, however, that these participants had *no* contact with the New Deal for Lone Parents before completing their questionnaire. Table 8.1.1 shows that while 13 per cent of lone parents who did not participate in NDLP

²² Of course, administrative records may not be a perfect record of who has taken part. Some people who have had quite substantial contact may not appear on administrative records, and others, who seem to be participants according to official records may not have had much contact or may deny participating when interviewed face to face. At this stage the status of participants and non-participants is taken as read. During the face to face interview checks will be conducted that the 'participant' had some meaningful contact with the programme (as during the prototype).

²³ Although it could be argued that the report should focus on all 2,996 participants who took part since sampling, this could be misleading. For example, positive attitudes and active job search behaviour could be falsely identified as attributes of individuals who join the programme, rather than as a consequence of joining.

mentioned contact with a New Deal For Lone Parents Adviser, this rises significantly to 30 per cent of the individuals who have since been identified as participants. This suggests that a substantial minority of participants (and to a lesser extent, non-participants) had some contact with the programme before responding to the questionnaire, perhaps exploring what it had to offer informally, or arranging to have an interview.

Table 8.1.1 Whether NDLP participants mention contact with an adviser

Adviser contact in questionnaire	Participant ²⁴		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
Mentions contact with an adviser	30	13	13
No mention of contact	70	88	87
Weighted base	1,658	39,573	41,231
Unweighted base	1,787	39,277	41,064

Base: All lone parents excluding those 1,209 individuals who participated in NDLP and then responded to the postal survey.

8.2 Key Characteristics of Participants and Non-participants

An examination of the characteristics of New Deal for Lone Parent participants and non-participants reveals some important differences that may be of value in developing policy. The postal survey provides much more data to allow for this than is available from administrative data alone. Exploring these differences may, for example, help identify sub-groups of the population that were not being reached by the programme as it existed, or as it was being promoted, at the time of the research. In addition, for the purpose of this study, understanding these differences is vital so that the correct factors can be taken into account when selecting non-participants who are suitable matches for the survey main stage.

One interesting finding is that there was statistically no significant difference in the likelihood of male and female respondents taking part in the New Deal for Lone Parents. In fact, during the short observation window, 4.1 per cent of women, compared to 3.6 per cent of men, took part in the programme (and returned the questionnaire before doing so). However, there was a slight variation with age, with younger lone parents more likely to take part (5.1 per cent of under 25 year olds compared to 2.2 per cent of 45 to 64 year olds). Table 8.2.1 confirms that participants are a rather younger group than non-participants with 23 per cent under the age of 25 compared to 18 per cent among non-participants.

²⁴ For this, and all other tables in this chapter, we entirely exclude the 1209 individuals who participated in the programme and then returned their postal questionnaire since they are likely to have been affected by the programme. As a result, we cannot use their data to help compare the characteristics of people who participate and those who do not.

Table 8.2.1 Age of lone parent by participant status

Age of lone parent	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
Under 25	23	18	18
25 – 34	43	42	42
35 – 44	30	32	32
45 – 64	5	9	9
Weighted base	1,658	39,573	41,231
Unweighted base	1,787	39,277	41,064

Base: All lone parents excluding those 1,209 individuals who participated in NDLP and then responded to the postal survey.

There was no difference between participation rates among white lone parents and black lone parents (both approximately four per cent) but Asian and mixed race/other ethnic group lone parents were *less* likely to take part in New Deal For Lone Parents (both three per cent).²⁵ However, since older lone parents were less likely to take part, and Asian lone parents were on average older, this variation by ethnic group could be in part a reflection of the variation by age. Table 8.2.2 shows that the population of NDLP participants has a slightly higher proportion of white lone parents than the population of non-participants.

Table 8.2.2 Ethnic group of lone parent by participant status

Ethnic group	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
White	90	88	88
Black	5	5	5
Asian	3	3	3
Mixed/other	2	3	3
Weighted base	1,587	37,948	39,535
Unweighted base	1,717	37,742	39,459

Base: All lone parents excluding those 1,209 individuals who participated in NDLP and then responded to the postal survey.

As might be expected, participation in the New Deal for Lone Parents decreased as the number of children that a person was responsible for increased. Although the gradient is slight, 4.6 per cent of those with one child had taken part compared to 4.1 per cent of those with two, 3.4 per cent of those with three and 2.2 per cent of those with four or more children. The result, as Table 8.2.3 shows, is that the population of participants is more heavily represented by those with smaller families.

²⁵ At the 95% level

Table 8.2.3 Number of children by participant status

	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
One	48	42	42
Two	34	34	34
Three	12	16	16
Four or more	5	9	9
Weighted base	1,649	39,330	40,979
Unweighted base	1,778	39,038	40,861

Base: All lone parents

Despite expectations, the age category of a lone parent's youngest child did not have a straightforward bearing on their participation rates, though some of the relationships were significant. For example, the multi-variate model of participation revealed that having children under three did have an effect on participation. There also appears to be a significant difference in participation among those with a second (or third) child under the age of five.

Table 8.2.4 Number of children under five by participant status

Number of children under five	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
None	51	54	54
One	42	37	37
Two	7	9	9
Three or more	1	1	1
Weighted base	1,658	39,573	41,231
Unweighted base	1,787	39,277	41,064

Base: All lone parents

8.3 Other Factors Associated with Participation

As well as examining basic demographic variables, a number of important differences were identified between participants and non-participants based on factors such as tenure, qualifications, current activities and inclination to work.

One of the most important correlates of participation was the length of time that an individual had been receiving Income Support. The rate of participation decreased the longer an individual had been in receipt of Income Support (approximately five per cent for claims under two years; four per cent for claims of two to five years; and three per cent for claims of five years or more). In other words, participants were more likely to have shorter spells on Income Support than their non-participating counterparts. Table 8.3.1 confirms that participants were more likely to have short durations (44 per cent under two years on Income Support compared to 35 per cent of non-participants).

Table 8.3.1 Duration on Income Support by participant status

Duration on Income Support	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
Under 6 months	13	10	10
6-24 months	31	25	26
2-5 years	29	27	28
5 or more years	27	37	37
Weighted base	1,658	39,573	41,231
Unweighted base	1,787	39,277	41,064

Base: All lone parents

The rate of participation did not, however, seem to be related to tenure. Lone parents renting from a private landlord were more likely (4.9 per cent) to participate in New Deal For Lone Parents than their counterparts who rented from the Council or a housing association (3.9 per cent). Table 8.3.2 confirms that participants were slightly less likely to live in social housing and slightly more likely to rent from a private landlord but shows that the difference is small.

Table 8.3.2 Tenure by participant status

Tenure	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
Own/mortgage	10	10	10
Council/Housing Association	65	68	68
Private landlord	19	15	16
Parents/relative/other	6	7	7
Weighted base	1,638	38,891	40,529
Unweighted base	1,764	38,632	40,396

Base: All lone parents

A stronger relationship was found between participation and qualifications. Individuals with no qualifications were much less likely to participate in the programme (2.5 per cent) than individuals with both academic and vocational qualifications (6.4 per cent). This is an important finding, given that half of the population did not report having any qualifications. Indeed, just less than one third of the participant group reported no qualifications, compared with over one half of non-participants (Table 8.3.3).

A lone parent's own assessment of when he or she hopes to start work is a strong predictor of the likelihood of who will participate in the New Deal for Lone Parents. Those not in work, but hoping to work within the next six months were markedly the group most likely to have participated in the programme (11 per cent). Similarly, those hoping to start working six to 12 months in the future

Table 8.3.3 Qualifications by participant status

Qualifications	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
None or none reported	32	53	52
Academic only	33	25	25
Technical only	6	5	5
Both	29	18	18
Weighted base	1,658	39,573	41,231
Unweighted base	1,787	39,277	41,064

Base: All lone parents

were also more likely to take part in the programme (5.9 per cent). At the other end of the scale, individuals who considered that ‘work is not a realistic option for me in the next three years’ were the least likely to have taken part in the programme (1.3 per cent). Table 8.3.4 confirms that the participant group are heavily populated by individuals who want to work relatively soon. That said, there is an important minority of 11 per cent of lone parents who had participated in NDLP but said they had no realistic option of starting work in the next three years.

Table 8.3.4 When hopes to start work by participant status

When hopes to start work	Participant		Total %
	Yes %	No %	
Works now	8	10	10
Within 6 months	31	10	11
Within 12 months	25	17	18
Within 3 years	21	22	22
In next 3 years/don't know when	3	3	3
Not an option in next 3 years	11	37	36
Weighted base	1,624	38,117	39,741
Unweighted base	1,751	37,919	39,670

Base: All lone parents

Another possible insight into the characteristics of programme participants is to establish whether they are frequent users of other services. In the three months before completing the questionnaires, lone parents who had subsequently participated in the New Deal were appreciably more likely to be in touch with other services. In particular, they were more likely to have been in contact with the Employment Service Jobcentre (21 per cent versus ten per cent of non-participants) and the New Deal for Lone Parents itself (18 per cent compared to six per cent). Multivariate analysis showed that the more services an individual contacted, the higher was the likelihood that they would participate.

Table 8.3.5 Services used in last three months by participant status

People or services contacted in last 3 months	Participant		All %
	Yes %	No %	
Citizens Advice Bureau	14	13	13
Careers Adviser	8	4	4
New Deal for Lone Parents	18	6	6
Employment Service Jobcentre	21	10	10
Benefits Agency local office	29	27	27
Support groups ¹	3	2	2
Telephoned an advice line	11	8	8
None of these in the last 3 months	42	57	57
Weighted base	1,584	37,066	38,650
Unweighted Base	1,712	36,942	38,654

Base: All lone parents

¹For example Gingerbread, NACOPF or One Parent Scotland

Even more noticeable is the strong inclination of NDLP participants, relative to the rest of the lone parent population, to seek out support or advice. From Table 8.3.6 it can be seen that far more individuals who participated in NDLP expressed an interest in different services with between a third and a half mentioning each option. Among non-participants, one quarter expressed an interest in most services. Perhaps surprisingly, however, 63 per cent nevertheless said they were not interested in any of these services or did not answer the question.

Table 8.3.6 Interest in support or advice by participant status

Types of support or advice	Participant		All %
	Yes %	No %	
Find or apply for training/education	43	24	25
Thinking about getting ready for work	53	25	26
Find or get paid work	55	25	26
Try out a job (e.g. 2 week placement)	34	16	16
Stay in work once you have a job	43	24	25
Work out better/worse off in work	53	25	26
Claim in-work benefits	55	25	26
Not interested in any of these	63	75	75
Weighted base	1,658	39,573	41,231
Unweighted Base	1,787	39,277	41,064

Base: All lone parents

Clearly, there are many factors which affect participation and which can be used to distinguish between participants and non-participants. In this section of the report bivariate analyses have been used to explore these relationships. The technical companion to this report (Lessof *et al.*, forthcoming) includes a multivariate analysis of different variables which together can be used to

explain who participates in NDLP. The model developed so far suggests that the following factors or statements were associated with an increased likelihood of participation though this list provides preliminary information only and should not be taken as a full account since other factors were also significant:

- Hoping to be able to start work within the next six months;
- *Disagreement* with the statement 'women with school-aged children should never work full-time';
- Being without a health condition or disability;
- Currently studying or training or hoping to start a course in the next year;
- Having made contact with other people or services in the three months before completing the postal questionnaire;
- Having academic qualifications (the higher the qualification the greater the likelihood of participation);
- Being an owner-occupier;
- Having use of a telephone;
- Having a full driving license
- Having worked in the last four years
- The number of hours the individual prefers to work.

The final report, based on face to face interviews which will take place in Autumn 2001, will provide a fuller account of participation which draws on the data available here as well as the survey data.

9 Conclusions

Conclusions at this stage of the analysis are tentative, but fall under three headings:

- how well the postal survey serves the strategy for the evaluation of New Deal For Lone Parents, in particular as a method of enhancing information available from administrative data to enable the right participants and non-participants to be matched for the sample who will be interviewed face to face,
- what the survey reveals about the population of lone parents, especially in aspects that are not necessarily well known from other studies, such as their use of various sources of advice and support,
- what the survey reveals about the potential impact of a 'work first' programme such as New Deal For Lone Parents.

9.1 The Postal Survey as Part of the Evaluation Strategy

The postal survey has fulfilled its function of providing a sample of participants whose attitudes to work and whose situation were known prior to their first New Deal For Lone Parents interview. Lags between sampling and the start of mailings (and the need to re-select part of the sample, who received a later mailing) meant that about half of the participants who returned the postal questionnaire had their first NDLP interview before returning their postal questionnaire. They will probably not be used further in the matched sample design, although they do provide a group of participants whose progress can be tracked using other data.

The response rate to the postal survey is in line with expectations based on the pilot survey, at 64.4 per cent. The use of weighting, drawing on the wide range of information in administrative data, means that virtually all the bias likely to arise with non-response can be eliminated, and the weighted analyses can be confidently interpreted as representative of eligible lone parents. The prediction that those 'closer to work' in general and participants in particular would be more likely to return a postal questionnaire appears to have been correct. There is also some evidence that the postal survey raised the rate of participation fractionally among sample members.

Although there were some gaps in the data, as with all postal surveys, the quality of the data set is very good indeed. However, the important point is that the range of questions asked, and the analyses which can be performed with the postal data supplemented in a few cases with administrative data, look very promising for estimating the propensity to participate.

9.2 What the Survey Reveals About the Lone Parent Population

In many respects, the postal survey has confirmed aspects of existing research about lone parents on Income Support. It is clear that many of them aspire to

work, but only at an undefined point in the future. They place a high value on their responsibilities to their children. While most lone parents have only one or two children, those with three or more children generally appear to have greater difficulty moving into work. Many of them experience long spells of reliance on Income Support, and this is linked to lack of qualifications, living in social housing, having health problems or having caring responsibility for someone else. Many of the people in this position continue to depend on Income Support to the point where they are aged 40 or over and their children are of secondary school age, but they continue to face difficulty entering the labour market. About one in five, even in the older age group, have never had a paid job.

At any time, only a relatively small proportion of those in this population are able to envisage moving into work at a point in the next six months. A somewhat larger group are thinking that they will move into work, but at a point more than six months in the future. At this stage, with the intention to work in the near future, lone parents become active in job search and in seeking support or guidance. This is the situation in which they are most likely to become involved with New Deal For Lone Parents. Those who reach this position are not necessarily the ones with children at school; some of them have one or two children aged under five. Most of them do not have a large number of children. They are likely to have worked at some point in the past, perhaps quite recently. Those who had worked in the past tended to have worked full-time prior to their Income Support claim. Some of them have remained in work while claiming Income Support, but those in this position typically work a small number of hours each week. The lone parents who are hoping to work in the near future are likely to have qualifications of some sort, and they are more likely than other lone parents to have a telephone at home and a driving licence. They are likely to have used childcare in the past, but this is likely to have been informal help from friends and relatives, rather than formal providers such as childminders or nurseries, except where these are provided alongside schooling.

Among the lone parents who reported that moving into work in the next three years was not an option, a key feature was that they experienced multiple barriers to work. However, the survey also shows that those who were hoping to move into work in the next three years were not immune from such barriers. It appears that they feel they can cope with a number of barriers. Given the right circumstances, barriers make working more difficult, but they do not rule it out. However, such barriers may make sustained work difficult to achieve.

9.3 Implications for the Likely Impact of the New Deal for Lone Parents

The calculation of the propensity score will formalise a clearly-evident aspect of the New Deal for Lone Parents. At any one time, its approach is relevant for only a minority of the lone parent population in receipt of Income Support. Among some sub-groups, this is a larger minority, but it is always a relatively small proportion of the population. Among the 'harder to help', only a small minority of lone parents see the opportunity to receive help to move into work as being relevant to their situation.

Rather than focus attention on the two extreme situations, it is helpful to visualise the lone parent population as being distributed along a continuum of readiness to work. Those most job ready are likely to achieve the transition to work irrespective of the programme's existence. This is not to say that they will not benefit from participation, just that they would probably achieve a move into work, even if the programme did not exist. At the other end of the spectrum, the constraint is not the capacity of the programme. Almost no amount of resources will alleviate the obstacles which lie ahead of such lone parents. Some of these barriers to work are within the lone parents themselves (such as lack of work experience, qualifications and poor health) and others exist in their local situation or among their dependants, including high dependency on the presence of the lone parent (quite often men, as well as women) to provide care.

In between these extremes, there is a broad majority of the lone parent population, who are attached to work but do not foresee being able to start work in a time-scale short enough to warrant more active forms of job search or to have motivated them to identify opportunities to engage in training or work experience. These people are likely to be demanding of programme resources and many of them will achieve the transition to work only in the medium term. However, this is the group among which there exists the greatest potential for New Deal For Lone Parents to encourage additional movement into work. Much of this would be in the form of accelerated transitions which would have happened in any case, but more slowly.

As with all active labour market programmes, the New Deal for Lone Parents inevitably has a significant level of dead-weight, as participants include many who would move into work in the absence of the programme. Improving the effectiveness of the programme depends on engaging successfully with those who are slightly more distant from the labour market. The results of this survey indicate that such individuals cannot be identified by means of administrative data, and thus cannot be targeted. The survey also illustrates the diversity of the lone parent population, which implies that the programme will need to adopt different types of action and make available different levels of resource to address the varied factors which inhibit movement into work.

The quantitative evaluation, when the final report based on face to face interviewing is submitted in 2002, will be able to estimate the additional employment attributable to the programme given the current profile of participation. In putting these findings into context, relating them to the population eligible to participate, the results of this survey will continue to be valuable, alongside other aspects of the evaluation.

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Appendix