



Welfare Conditionality

SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Supporting people into work? Findings from the Welfare Conditionality project

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Part 1: Introduction to *Welfare Conditionality: Sanctions, Support and Behaviour Change*



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What do we mean by welfare conditionality?

- Welfare recipients subject to various forms of conditions (Clasen and Clegg, 2007):
 - **Conditions of category**: membership of defined category (e.g. disabled, unemployed, etc.)
 - **Conditions of circumstance**: includes/excludes people depending on circumstances (e.g. passing means test)
 - **Conditions of conduct: demanding particular patterns of behaviour (behavioural conditions)**
 - Access to certain basic publicly provided welfare entitlements should “be subject to the condition that those who receive them behave in particular ways, or participate in specified activities” (Deacon, 1994: 53)
- ‘Conditionality consensus’
 - Successive Governments have increased the focus on conduct conditionality
 - Discourse around ‘responsibilities’ as well as ‘rights’ (Dwyer, 2016)
 - Conditionality now cuts across a range of policy areas/groups (e.g. unemployment, disability, homelessness, social housing, ASB/FIP, etc.)
- Underpinned by ‘sanctions’ and ‘support’

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

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Twin aims

To consider the effectiveness and ethicality of welfare conditionality

Fieldwork with three sets of respondents

1. Semi-structured interviews with 52 policymakers
2. 27 focus groups with frontline welfare practitioners who implement policy and work with welfare service users
3. Three rounds of repeat qualitative longitudinal interviews with a diverse sample of 482 welfare recipients who are subject to conditionality

Locations across England and Scotland

Greater Manchester, Bath, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, London, Peterborough, Sheffield, Warrington

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Exploring welfare conditionality across a range of policy domains and groups

- Recipients of social security benefits (unemployed people, lone parents, disabled people, Universal Credit)
- Homeless people
- Social tenants
- Individuals/families subject to antisocial behaviour orders/family intervention projects
- Offenders
- Migrants

Progress

- Policy maker/practitioner consultation completed
- First wave findings published
- Third and final wave of interviews completed
- Analysis underway...

Part 2: Emerging findings (wave a)



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Conditions

- **Thirty-five hour job search requirement**

Unrealistic. Very unrealistic. It's too much. It's too much for anybody. (WSU, UC recipient, male, Scotland)

Who could... go out looking for work for eight hours a day with no money... Yes, you've got to – cold calling they call it, knocking on firms' doors and this, that and the other... I think it's ridiculous. Who does that? Not only that; when you're on Universal Credit, who has got the finances to do that? (WSU, UC recipient, male, England)

- **In-work conditionality**

It's a bit degrading... my adviser, she isn't too bad. She says to me most times, 'I'm quite happy with what you're doing, and obviously you want to work because you're working, and it's not as though you're not looking for jobs.' But like they're always checking up on you. They always want to know... 'If I wasn't happy with you, we can sanction you.' Every other meeting it's kind of there, a reminder that like keep on doing what you're doing, otherwise this will happen to you.

Support

- **Minimal support to move into (and progress in) work**

The Jobcentre used to try and help you find work, you'd go in and they'd get on the computer and say, 'Oh we've got that many jobs today.' That doesn't happen anymore. They don't really help you to find a job. They just help you to sign on every two weeks." (WSU, UC recipient, male, England)

- **Examples of empathetic and supportive Jobcentre Plus advisors**

I really like my adviser. She's great... she's a really caring helpful person in general I find. It's not always been like that in there, but she is really lovely. I'm really happy to have her... It's been quite positive yes. It's fine yes." (WSU, UC recipient, female, England)

- **But variation across geographical areas, providers, advisors, etc.**

I think you've got one person thinks he's better than the rest, and that's it, you're getting sanctioned. It's like sometimes when you go in there, some of them will talk to you like a piece of rubbish...The one I've got now, [name of advisor] touch wood, he's been really nice with me (Male Universal Credit claimant, England)

Sanctions

- **Negative impacts universally reported by welfare service users**

I've gone a lot more into myself...To be honest, it's stressed me out that much...I'm just not how I was, where I was always full of life (Universal Credit claimant, England)

[The hospital] were saying, 'You've lost weight.' I said, 'Well I can't eat. I've got no food, I've got no money.' (Disabled man, England)

- **Disproportionate and inappropriate sanctions**

It was a genuine mistake but I'd still gone in that day, it's not as though I hadn't turned up or anything. So I rang up straightaway, I explained my situation and like I say it was generally just daft, but it was a mistake, an innocent but stupid mistake, we all make mistakes but I still did turn up and I got a sanction for a week (Universal Credit claimant, England)

Because I didn't fill my book in properly, they didn't really explain to me properly how to do it. I am a bit dyslexic; I can't read or write practically. (Ex offender, England)

- **Lack of communication and understanding**

I had so many sanctions and I didn't know what they were for. I rang the lady, it took about two weeks actually for this actual lady to actually ring me back (Female Universal Credit claimant, England)

Behaviour change

- **A stated aim of conditionality is positive behaviour change to:**
 - prepare for or find paid work
 - maintain and advance in paid work
 - encourage responsible behaviour
- **Assumption that positive behaviour amongst target groups is not possible without coercion ...**

Behaviour change

- **Virtually all welfare service user interviewees expressed the desire for the types of positive behaviour intended**

'If I get into employment, it's about being a good example for my kids. It's positive... it's good for the family situation, and that's the road I want to go down.' (Lone parent, Scotland)

- **Rare that conditionality worked to move people closer to the labour market**

Well, I want a job so I'd carry on doing what I'm doing anyway...It's not as if, if you don't get a sanction you're not going to do anything about getting a job...I want a job, so give me a job, I will go on it, I will for my own sanity (Female Universal Credit claimant, England)

Behaviour change

- **Behaviour change to comply with process at the expense of outcome**

[A] company wanted an HGV driver right I had to apply for that but I don't drive. Now where's the logic there do you know what I mean?...I applied for everything that was there just to prove to them that I'm applying for it. You're never going to get the job (Male Universal Credit claimant, England)

- **Counter productive consequences (e.g. survival crime)**

I got sanctioned for a month...It made me shoplift to tell you the truth. I couldn't survive with no money. I was homeless... So if I needed something I'd have to 'borrow it' from [supermarket]or something. (Homeless man, England)





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Thank you

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