

KEY POINTS

- Has the Government already made up its mind about these consultation proposals ?
- Home educating parents are already doing a full-time job educating their children
- Statements by Ministers Peter Hain and Caroline Flint suggest that decisions have already been taken
- Education Otherwise is unequivocally opposed to the proposals contained in this consultation.
- Education Otherwise requires urgent assurances from Ministers that the full JSA conditionality/sanctions regime will not be applied to home educating parents
- The consultation questions focus on lone parents, yet there are other far-reaching changes proposed in the Green Paper which will have a great impact on home educating parents who currently receive Incapacity Benefit or who are caring for disabled children. The Department has not consulted with home educating parents on these proposals.
- IPPR Freedom's Orphans : Raising Youth in a Changing World reveals uncomfortable truths about the lack of family life in Britain, how UK children are miserable and alienated, and how the long hours culture is damaging to children. Home educating parents are redressing this balance.
- CHARITY4CHILDREN research shows that teenagers feel unsafe when they come home from school to an empty house and when parents are out at work during the school holidays. These concerns about children's safety are of critical importance to home educating parents.
- UNICEF Report on Children and Young People's Wellbeing, puts UK at bottom of list of 21 countries in terms of adolescents' relationships with parents. Home educating parents are actively engaged in the important work of supporting young people through this difficult time.
- PRIMARY REVIEW findings on stress , anxiety and depression among young school children supports home educators' conviction that we are right to focus on our children's emotional wellbeing
- SEN/DISABILITY autism provision in mainstream schools is not fit for the purpose and home educating parents of SEN children will argue forcefully that they have no choice
- Home education can be a lifeline ; see Press Release from Education Otherwise in response to Unicef Report on Children's Wellbeing <http://www.freedomforchildrentogrow.org/pr140207.pdf>
- The Department's cost/benefit analysis is seriously flawed because the cost of implementation has not been taken into account, nor the high cost of subsidised childcare which will be necessary to move these proposals forward.

CRITIQUE OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Education Otherwise would first like to answer the question posed in the IA : "What further analysis do you think we need to do when undertaking a fuller equality impact assessment? How can we ensure that we have involved stakeholders in these assessments? "

Education Otherwise is a UK-based membership organisation which provides support and information for families whose children are being educated outside school. We have around 5,000 member families. Education Otherwise maintains a resource website, sends out a bi-monthly newsletter to members; holds regular open meetings ; offers support at grassroots level in 100+ local authority areas ; runs regional workshops throughout the country and also moderates a growing number of internet support lists which are both general interest and also offer support to home educators facing particular challenges such as single parents and families with disabled and Special Educational Needs children. The proposals set out in the DWP consultation In Work, Better Off have attracted a huge amount of attention and concern amongst our members and the Education Otherwise response will reflect members' feedback throughout.

Home educators were not consulted when this draft IA was drawn up ; Nor were families who are home educating disabled children and children with Special Educational Needs. Home educating parents are already doing a vitally important full-time job and this must be taken into consideration by the Department.

In general terms, the benefits in the IA are over-estimated and the costs are underestimated. The DWP places undue reliance on upbeat statistics from other New Deals which were significantly different, such as the New Deal for Young People on JSA where benefits were summarily cut if claimants did not comply and New Deal for Lone Parents which was voluntary and did NOT come with conditionality clauses and benefit sanctions. We are not comparing like with like. In particular, we would expect that the claimants taking up the offer on NDLP were ready and able to take up paid employment, since otherwise they could freely choose not to engage with the scheme; this would clearly NOT be a good predictor of outcomes if the scheme were universal and mandatory.

As One Parent Families' 2007 response to the Freud Report points out, there is no evidence either from the UK or further afield such as the US, that conditionality and compulsion works in supporting lone parents into sustainable employment.

1. A universal requirement to search for work is inappropriate, "expensive, unfair and ineffectual. "
2. A key factor in the increase in lone parent employment has been the introduction of tax credits. This leads to more sustained employment than for example the voluntary New Deal for Lone Parents where nearly a third of participants who gained employment via the scheme were back on benefits within a year.
3. The OPF response quotes research from other countries where a similar welfare to work programme was attempted.

<http://www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk/index.cfm?fuseaction=med.viewMedium&mediumID=1048&mediumType=1&ch=0&uo=0&lsp=0>

With reference to the cost/benefit analysis pp 6-7 :

- The IA figures do NOT include the cost of implementing the scheme
- DWP notes that the figures are "very initial"
- The Department of Work and Pensions states in the Impact Assessment that it is aware that it needs more information from stakeholders about the cost of the various proposals
- Home educating parents are already doing a vitally important full-time job
- Home educators receive no funding but if home educating parents were forced into paid work outside the home, each home educated child who was thereby compelled to enter the school system would cost the Government around £5,000 for the school place alone, before taking into account the provisions of extended schools and any childcare subsidies
- The IA figures do NOT include any costings for Government spending on childcare, which rather skews the cost/benefit analysis
- Lack of costings for childcare in the IA cost/benefit analysis is particularly relevant when childcare costs would be HIGH eg for anti-social hours or for child with SEN/disability or when childcare might be provided on a one to one basis in the child's home as proposed by Minister Caroline Flint in the webchat on October 15th.
- The cost of childcare for disabled children and those with Special Educational Needs who are currently being educated and cared for at the parents' expense at home, is likely to be prohibitive, since there will need to be a very high adult to child ratio. and in some cases there will need to be physical adaptations to buildings such as childminders' homes and After-School clubs.
- In very many areas our members tell us that even if money were no object, this type of additional needs childcare is simply not available, particularly for children on the autistic spectrum or for those with ADHD.

- An increasing number of autistic children are now home educated due to provision in the maintained sector not being fit for the purpose. Children with ASD are highly stressed by unfamiliar surroundings and group childcare and this would clearly have an enormous impact on the parents' availability for work.
- A quarter of lone parents who remain on Income Support after their child is 12 have a child with disabilities, which could severely restrict the lone parent's availability for paid work.
- For some reason, the IA figures also appear NOT to include any guesstimate for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.
- The DWP guesses that it would cost £50 million over 3 years to assist lone parents into work.
- The DWP guesses that since a high proportion of new JSA claimants would find work, the Government might save between £50 million and £300 million because benefits would no longer need to be paid and also new earners would be paying Income Tax and National Insurance.
- DWP does however concede that tax credits will have to be paid.
- This is clearly a vast under-estimate of both the immediate and sustained earning capacities of lone parent JSA claimants.
- It also underestimates the financial burden of personally tailored back to work support systems, compared with the automated unconditional payment of Income Support
- One size does not fit all and a family's individual circumstances need to be taken into account. This makes JSA for lone parents much less straightforward to administer.
-

The Government has set a target of 70% employment rate for lone parents across the board. This means getting a much higher percentage of lone parents into paid work when their children are much younger than 12 as well as driving up the employment rate closer to 80% for lone parents whose children are over 12.

- The arguments for this targeting of lone parent families are that "children are lifted out of poverty" and that people who have been out of the job market for some time find it increasingly hard either to enter or to return, so breaks from paid work should be shortened wherever possible.
- The following "paid work" percentages are from the Government's Impact Assessment
 - 43% of lone parents with children under 7 are in paid work.
 - 60% of lone parents with children between 7 and 11 are in paid work.
 - 70% of lone parents with children over aged 12 are already in paid work.
- One Parent Families organisation points out that JobCentre statistics focus on short term jobs (claimants on New Deal programmes are only tracked for 13 weeks)
- A large number of NDYP participants who are counted as success stories because they move into employment are back on JSA within a year, familiarly known as the revolving door syndrome.
- Nearly a third of NDLP participants who secured work via the scheme are back on IS within a year

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS IN WORK, BETTER OFF

Question 1:

At the moment, lone parents are entitled to Income Support until their youngest child is 16. Is it right that this age should be reduced?

COMMENTS

The overwhelming reaction from the home education community to this question is firstly that home educating parents are already doing a very important full time job which is never recognised by Government, and secondly that the consultation poses the question as though the outcome is not yet decided, but this is contradicted by public statements from Ministers.

These proposals are causing a huge amount of distress to the children of home educating lone parents. Lone parents are already being told at JobCentres that these measures have been decided and that their children will have to be put in schools. Children present at these interviews are traumatised.

Home educating parents and children require as a matter of urgency an assurance from the Department and from Ministers that, should these proposals go ahead, there will be exceptions and modifications to the present conditionality/sanctions regime of Jobseeker's Allowance. This is imperative for parents who home educate their children.

We read in the consultation document and in speeches from Ministers that the Government is proposing to reduce this to age 12 in 2008 and further to age 7 in 2010.

Ministers Peter Hain and Caroline Flint have both made public statements which give the strong impression that this has already been decided. MP Caroline Flint has announced on both Netmums site and the ParentsCentre Forum that these measures will go ahead.

However, Peter Hain has said on BBC Radio Five Live that "this will not be a forced regime where, regardless of circumstances, you have to work".

"Individual family circumstances will have to be taken into account - if there's a disabled child for example - and, more important than any of this, the childcare, affordable childcare, needs to be available."

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7066838.stm

Education Otherwise has made further detailed comments on childcare issues in the critique of the Impact Assessment accompanying this consultation.

Mr Hain has also said in a recent speech that "there will, of course, be lone parents for whom work is simply not an option and I will ensure that they will be protected."

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/aboutus/2007/25-10-07.asp>

Education Otherwise would like to point out that parents who home educate their children are already doing a full-time job. A number of lone parents are also home educating children with disabilities and

special educational needs. Home educating parents already have full-time caring responsibilities. Natural justice requires that in very many cases, home education will fall into the category of "lone parents for whom work is simply not an option", though we take strong exception to the way that the word "work" has become synonymous with "paid employment".

The Disability Group of Education Otherwise has also made a response to this consultation.

Question 2:

What would the minimum age be?

COMMENTS

We are not prepared to suggest a minimum age. There is no evidence from the Impact Assessment or elsewhere that the present age of 16 should be lowered for parents with caring responsibilities. A mandatory New Deal for Lone Parents would be totally inappropriate. In particular, home educating parents on Income Support and Incapacity Benefit should not be moved to "active benefits" since they are already engaged in the full time job of educating their children at home. Further exemptions will also apply in the case of parents who are home educating children with disabilities and special educational needs. Many home educated children have been removed from the state system following severe bullying. There will be Disability Discrimination cases if home educated children with SEN are forced back into schools through the Government's welfare to work proposals, since research by Mencap shows that more than half of children on the autistic spectrum have been the victims of bullying. The elements of compulsion and conditionality should be removed and lone parents who are ready and able, by their own judgement, to enter the workforce should be given support and encouragement in the form of tax credits, help with childcare and other assistance as requested by parents. Education Otherwise echoes the grave concerns of One Parent Families organisation that "many of the training courses offered under these schemes have not been designed with the needs of those with caring responsibilities in mind. The sanctions regime for Jobseeker's Allowance is considerably tougher than that for Income Support, with failure to attend an interview at the Jobcentre capable of producing a total stop to benefit. Were lone parents to be subject to this aspect of the regime the impacts on their children's welfare during a period of sanctioning are likely to be highly negative." [Reference](#)

Question 3:

Should we do more to ensure that our support for lone parents is accessible and useful for all groups, in particular those with disabled children and those from certain disadvantaged groups and areas?

COMMENTS

We need to clarify here exactly what is meant here by "support" ? Are parents asking for support in

entering the job market, do they require support to be able to carry out their caring responsibilities, or are they saying that they just want to be left alone to do their job of raising and educating their children? Education Otherwise Disability Group is making a detailed response to the aspects of this consultation which focus on parents with disabled children. As we have stated in our comments to Question 2, The elements of compulsion and conditionality should be removed and lone parents who are ready and able, by their own judgement, to enter the workforce should be given support and encouragement in the form of tax credits, help with childcare and other assistance as requested by parents. Education Otherwise echoes the grave concerns of One Parent Families organisation that "many of the training courses offered under these schemes have not been designed with the needs of those with caring responsibilities in mind. The sanctions regime for Jobseeker's Allowance is considerably tougher than that for Income Support, with failure to attend an interview at the Jobcentre capable of producing a total stop to benefit. Were lone parents to be subject to this aspect of the regime the impacts on their children's welfare during a period of sanctioning are likely to be highly negative." [Reference](#)

Education Otherwise is sceptical of what is meant by "certain disadvantaged groups and areas". As an organisation, we speak on behalf of home educating families who, contrary to the popular media stereotype of well-off middle class families, often come from disadvantaged areas and groups. We would be entirely opposed to any discrimination on the part of Government towards any of our members.

Education Otherwise also wishes to reiterate that parents who home educate children with disabilities and special educational needs have not been consulted about any of these proposals and that our members are greatly concerned about the additional stress and trauma which is currently being caused to these children.

**Question 4:
More frequent Work Focused Interviews are currently offered to lone parents in the two years before their eligibility to Income Support is lost. As the age of the youngest child is reduced, should other forms of support be provided, and over what period prior to loss of eligibility?**

COMMENTS

Attendance at work focused interviews every 3 months is ALREADY mandatory in the 2 years preceding loss of eligibility to Income Support (currently when child is 16) The wording of the question says that the interviews are "offered" and yet if claimants do not take up the interview offer then benefits are cut. Work focused interviews are "offered" in the same way for lone parents of younger children on an annual basis, with benefit sanctions for non-attendance.

Conceivably, work focused interviews could be extended to lone parents of younger children on a voluntary basis, particularly since we have seen from DWP research that the highest take up of the

voluntary NDLP has been amongst parents of younger children
http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0199-2536797/Publication-of-DWP-research-New.html#abstract .

We would emphasise that participation in any Welfare to Work scheme must always be voluntary and would again want to echo the views of One Parent Families when they state that "the sanctions regime for Jobseeker's Allowance is considerably tougher than that for Income Support, with failure to attend an interview at the Jobcentre capable of producing a total stop to benefit. Were lone parents to be subject to this aspect of the regime the impacts on their children's welfare during a period of sanctioning are likely to be highly negative." [Reference](#)

Question 5:

For lone parents who move onto Jobseeker's Allowance when they lose Income Support eligibility, what forms of support (in addition to those provided to Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who are not lone parents) should be available, and over what timescale?

COMMENTS

Exceptions must be made to the JSA regime for JSA claimants with extra caring responsibilities in the form of home educating their children and/or if their children are disabled or have Special Educational Needs.

Education Otherwise echoes what One Parent Families organisation says about the deficiencies and rigidities of the present JSA regime

The most substantial of these [conditions for JSA] is the requirement that Jobseekers be available for work of at least 16 hours. Lone parents who cannot find childcare, particularly the third of lone parents with children in this age group who are caring for a disabled child, may find it impossible to fulfil this requirement.

Exemptions from the requirement to be available for work would have to be put in place for this group. Lisa Harker's report to the department on tackling child poverty recommended that any extension of conditionality to lone parents, such as proposed here, should be dependent on the existence of sufficient childcare. Further concerns arise about the ability of lone parents to fulfil the requirements of the 'intensive activity' or 'options' periods of the New Deals which they would, presumably, be mandated to join after the requisite period on benefit.

Many of the training courses offered under these schemes have not been designed with the needs of those with caring responsibilities in mind.

The sanctions regime for Jobseeker's Allowance is considerably tougher than that for Income Support, with failure to attend an interview at the Jobcentre capable of producing a total stop to benefit.

Were lone parents to be subject to this aspect of the regime the impacts on their children's welfare during a period of sanctioning are likely to be highly negative." [Reference](#)

Question 6:

Jobseeker's Allowance recipients can, in certain circumstances, restrict their search for work to a minimum of 16 hours per week. Should additional flexibilities be available if the proposed changes are made?

COMMENTS

Lone parents who home educate and parents who home educate disabled children will require extra dispensation from the JobCentre and from specialist back-to-work provision and an understanding that the claimant will NOT be available for the minimum 16 hours which is being proposed for parents whose children are in school. The DWP needs to issue guidance on this matter as a matter of urgency, since our members are already being harassed by JobCentre staff.

Question 7:

What form might a 'better off in work' assurance for lone parents take?

COMMENTS

JobCentre statistics focus on unsustainable jobs, with claimants moving off benefit to short term jobs and then returning to JSA. At present this is counted as a New Deal success in getting lone parents "back to work". This does NOT mean that lone parent families are "better off". One Parent Families has done a great deal of research in this area. Parents who home educate are adamant that their children are "better off" by being home educated.

Education Otherwise takes exception to Peter Hain's recent statements at Welfare Voices conference co-hosted by Child Poverty Action Group and One Parent Families that his "commitment to see more people move from benefits to work was strengthened by seeing statistics from a number of countries around the world showing that being out of work is not only bad for the health and well being of parents, but of their children as well."

Peter Hain said:

"Since taking up this job, I have been shocked by the statistics I have seen about the impact that living in a household in which the parent or parents do not work. The notion that life without work – whatever the level of income through benefits – is a stress-free experience is not just wrong, it's dangerous. A study published in the British Medical Journal showed that the death rate from all external causes for children of parents classified as never having worked or as long term unemployed was 13.1

times that for children of professionals. Also the prevalence of psychiatric disorders among children in families whose parents have never worked is around five times greater than those with parents in professional occupations. And while overall the rates of deaths from injury and poisoning in children have fallen in England and Wales over the last 20 years, they have not for children in families in which no adult is in paid employment. This is shocking and underlines for me even more starkly why our crusade for full employment in our generation is so important. "

The BMJ study in fact says "Explanations for the inequalities that persist between children from workless families and those in work are necessarily speculative but probably lie in different exposures to risk as there is no reliable evidence that differences in attitudes and knowledge can account for them. The higher risk of being killed as a pedestrian, compared with as a car occupant, certainly suggests greater exposure to risk of road injury. Their higher risks of dying in house fires may reflect the quality and type of housing, with the greatest risks for those in temporary and poor housing."
<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/333/7559/119?rss=1>

Statistics from One Parent Families show that half the families in poverty have at least one member working, so the Government would have to address questions of the minimum wage and better pay and conditions for part time workers with family and extra caring responsibilities. The Minister sometimes appears to recognise this.

Moreover, home educating parents on low income are extremely concerned for the safety and emotional wellbeing of their children and believe very strongly that any move to force home educating parents into the workforce will have an extremely deleterious effect on their children. Home educating parents take the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of their children extremely seriously, which is why many children are removed from school following severe bullying.

Question 8:

Are any special provisions required for lone parents who move onto benefits other than Jobseeker's Allowance (for example, Employment and Support Allowance or Carer's Allowance)?

COMMENTS

Education Otherwise shares the grave concerns of other organisations about the conversion of Incapacity Benefit to Employment and Support Allowance. In many cases this will bring an obligation to be actively seeking work, which is NOT compatible with full-time home education and caring responsibilities. There are additional problems with Carers' Allowance since a claim depends on the prior success of a claim for Disability Living Allowance, which we know from extensive members' feedback is increasingly difficult, with more and more cases being turned down and going to appeal and Independent Advice centre workers not being adequately trained to offer useful assistance. The DLA forms are very detailed and off-putting and many claimants don't have anyone who can help them with the forms and with subsequent appeals if the claim is rejected.

This area of the Government's Green Paper is not adequately covered by the present consultation.

Education Otherwise Disability Group is also making a detailed response to this consultation.

Question 9:

In addition to the improvements in childcare provision and the right to request flexible

working, is there further support that should be provided to help lone parents into work and support them whilst there?

COMMENTS

Lone parents who educate their children at home have additional caring responsibilities and should be exempt from the elements of compulsion associated with the full JSA regime. JSA will have to be modified and personalised to take these special circumstances into account.

At the recent launch of the Child Poverty Unit Peter Hain stated that working tax credits and minimum wage requirements had done most to raise children out of poverty.

<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/Content/Detail.asp?ReleaseID=326332&NewsAreaID=2> Education Otherwise has further addressed this issue in the critique of the Impact Assessment for this consultation.

We have covered this question elsewhere, particularly in the critique of the Impact Assessment which is included with this consultation response.

Question 10:

What more could we do to help working families - especially those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds - improve their earnings and lift themselves out of poverty?

COMMENTS

Half the families in poverty have at least one member working, so the Government would have to address questions of the minimum wage and better pay and conditions for part time workers with family and extra caring responsibilities. The Minister sometimes appears to recognise this.

Question 11:

What more could we do to help ethnic minority women, particularly of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, overcome specific barriers they face?

Education Otherwise is not making a response to this question.

Question 12:

In exchange for more specialist support, are we right to ask more of those who have been unemployed and receiving benefit the longest?

COMMENTS

No. Home educating parents may have been out of the job market for a relatively long time but this is due to having additional caring responsibilities. Our members should not be penalised for taking these responsibilities seriously.

Question 13:

Should there be any exceptions to this approach of increased conditionality and increased support?

COMMENTS

Yes, parents who home educate their children must be an exception. This area has been fully covered elsewhere in the Education Otherwise consultation response and Impact Assessment critique.

Question 14:

Is a structured, progressive regime of support and conditionality at fixed intervals the right approach?

COMMENTS

No. Any system must be far more flexible and tailored to meet the individual. Lone parents who home educate will require conditionality terms to be deferred or waived if the Government goes ahead with proposals to move all lone parents on to JSA. This is not the most effective way to increase participation in the labour market and the Minister has already recognised this. At the recent launch of the Child Poverty Unit Peter Hain stated that working tax credits and minimum wage requirements had done most to raise children out of poverty.

<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/Content/Detail.asp?ReleaseID=326332&NewsAreaID=2> Education Otherwise has further addressed this issue in the critique of the Impact Assessment for this consultation.

We would like to re-state here that conditionality and sanctions are neither humane nor effective.

Question 15:

Should some people be enabled or required to enter the Gateway stage more quickly than others, taking account of their employment history or needs? Which groups should be 'fast-tracked'?

We are not answering this question.

Question 16:

Should we require a period of work experience from those who do not succeed in getting work after benefiting from a more intensive level of help from specialist providers? How can we best ensure that this work experience is beneficial?

COMMENTS

Lone parents who home educate will not be available for work experience in the same way as parents whose children are in school. This area has already been covered elsewhere in the consultation response and in the critique of the Impact Assessment accompanying the consultation document.