

Irresponsible Citizens?

The Lived Experiences of Welfare Reform

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Abstract

This thesis reports on a qualitative longitudinal study into the lived experiences of welfare reform under the 2010-15 Westminster coalition government. Between 2011 and 2013, a small group of out-of-work benefit claimants were interviewed three times as they were directly affected by changes to the benefits system. In these interviews, disability benefit(s) recipients, young jobseekers and single parents shared both their experiences and attitudes to the coalition's reform programme. The study found a significant disjuncture between the dominant citizenship narratives of recent governments and lived realities for those directly affected by welfare reform. The hard work that 'getting by' on benefits demands, and the various forms of socially valuable contribution in which so many of the participants were engaged, counter the dominant characterisation of claimants as inactive and passive. Relationships with paid employment were found to be far more fluid and complex than is suggested by successive governments' repeated recourse to static divisions between 'welfare dependants' and the 'hardworking majority'. Tracking experiences of welfare reform over time showed the worry and anxiety that changes to benefits were causing, with little evidence of welfare-to-work 'support' being experienced positively. There were also examples of participants internalising negative characterisations of claimants, in ways which were profoundly damaging to their sense of self and their wider inclusion within society.

Over the past 35 years, welfare reforms and an increasingly negative rhetoric around 'welfare dependency' have significantly devalued the social rights of citizenship, with citizenship increasingly operating in exclusionary ways. Those relying on out-of-work benefits are granted a lesser citizenship status, with their right to a 'modicum of economic security' (Marshall, 1950, p.8) seriously undermined. There are signs of a shift from 'conditionality' to 'conditioning', such that individual claimants become accepting of an individualisation of responsibility which places the 'blame' for individuals' reliance on benefits with the individual herself. There is also evidence that political agreement on welfare reform is contributing to a broader moral consensus on the supposedly negative characteristics of both 'welfare' and those who rely on it for all or most of their income.

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List of abbreviations

CPAG – Child Poverty Action Group
CRB – Criminal Records Bureau
DBC – Disability Benefit(s) Claimant
DLA – Disability Living Allowance
DWP – Department for Work and Pensions
ESA – Employment and Support Allowance
IFS – Institute for Fiscal Studies
IS – Income Support
ISMP – Initial Sample
JCP – Job Centre Plus
JSA – Jobseeker’s Allowance
LPOs – Lone Parent Obligations
LSMP – Longitudinal Sample
PIP – Personal Independence Payments
SG – Support Group
SP – Single Parent
WFIs – Work-Focused Interviews
WP – Work Programme
WRAG – Work-related activity group
YJS – Young Jobseeker

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Political context

In May 2010, newly appointed Prime Minister David Cameron stood outside No. 10 Downing Street and delivered a short victory speech, promising to “rebuild responsibility in our country” (2010a). Warning of the hard work and difficult decisions to come, Cameron set out his vision for a better, more responsible society:

[A society] where we don't just ask what are my entitlements, but what are my responsibilities. One where we don't just ask what I am owed, but what more can I give. And a guide for that society – that those that can should, and those who can't we will always help (Cameron, 2010a, unpaginated).

This vision contained both a promise and a thinly veiled threat; the promise to protect those who cannot help themselves, the threat that those who 'can' – read as participate in paid employment - will be expected to do so rather than relying on the state to support them. Cameron's notion of personal responsibility, firmly equated with 'doing the right thing' by working in the formal labour market, has been a driving force in the welfare reforms and policy direction adopted by his government between 2010 and 2015. Critically, both political rhetoric and policy emphasis are focused on a presumed deficit of individual responsibility among some of the poorest in society, hence, the need to 'responsibilise' such individuals through welfare reforms that finally make work pay and ensure that no one is able to 'choose' benefits as a 'lifestyle choice' (cf. Cameron, 2010b; Cameron, 2012c; Osborne, 2010b). While Cameron may speak of the responsibilities of us all, the reality is that policy attention is directed at those on out-of-work benefits with a comparative neglect of the responsibilities of those further up the income chain (Harrison and Sanders, 2014; Patrick, 2014a).

Cameron's time as Prime Minister coincides with, and arguably has contributed to, a wider societal context that has seen a hardening of public attitudes to out-of-work benefit claimants, with the problems of poverty and worklessness increasingly understood as individual problems of behaviour and character (Baumberg, 2014; Jensen, 2015). There is also growing resistance to what are sometimes seen as overly-generous social welfare benefits, with as many as 62% of those surveyed in 2011 believing that excessive benefits foster idleness (Clark, 2014, p.207). At the same time, there has been an explosion of reality television shows and 'documentaries' purporting to show the 'reality' of life on benefits in Britain today, what some now term 'Poverty Porn' (Jensen, 2015; Tyler, 2014a). Programmes

such as *Benefits Street* and *On Benefits and Proud*, with their particular, edited view of reliance on out-of-work benefits embed inherently negative views about 'welfare' and worklessness, which become doxic as they are increasingly taken for granted and accepted as part of a new 'commonsense' (Hall et al., 2013; Jensen, 2014). Such programmes are widely discussed and disseminated in the popular media, a media that is increasingly confident and ready to stereotype, belittle and arguably vilify out-of-work benefit claimants (Jensen, 2014).

In government rhetoric, popular media representations and wider public discourse, a firm demarcation is drawn between responsible and irresponsible behaviours, with irresponsibility closely associated with reliance on out-of-work benefits for all but a very small, residual category of genuinely 'deserving' cases. Irresponsibility is itself tied to what is characterised as an inherently negative state of 'welfare dependency', which is contrasted with the responsible behaviours of those who achieve 'independence' through their paid employment. This framing of (ir)responsibility is then mobilised to defend widespread welfare reform, and significant reductions in social welfare provision.

There is a constant drip feed of policy and media discussion about what needs to be done to out-of-work claimants to make them responsible, and to integrate them into mainstream society. However, there is comparatively little attention paid to claimants' own experiences and values, and to how far and whether the dominant characterisations actually correspond to individual lived realities. The irresponsibility of out-of-work claimants is presumed, and constantly restated, but there is a lack of detailed consideration of the day-to-day lives of those who are delineated, demarcated and ultimately excluded in this way. This thesis seeks to contribute to a small but growing number of empirical studies that explore the lived experiences of out-of-work benefit claimants (Garthwaite, 2014; MacDonald et al., 2014; Shildrick et al., 2012b; Wright, 2015), giving voice to these experiences and, critically, contrasting them with the dominant characterisations.

An empirically driven study, this thesis is concerned to explore how a small group of out-of-work claimants experienced and responded to the welfare reforms introduced by the 2010-15 coalition government. Critically, the study followed out-of-work claimants over time, allowing a more fluid and dynamic picture to emerge of lived experiences, and enabling the researcher to track both change and the absence of change in individual lives.

This introductory chapter sets out the political and theoretical context for this study, and highlights how ideas of social citizenship are utilised to frame and theorise the

empirical insights generated. The rationale for the research's focus is discussed, before an exploration of the approaches taken to social citizenship, 'welfare', agency and time. The overarching research aims and questions are then outlined, followed by an overview of the thesis's structure.

1.2 Choosing to research lived experiences of welfare reform

This thesis reports on research started in September 2010, four months after the formation of the 2010-15 Westminster coalition government. The thesis was completed in April 2015, just before the 2015 General election, and all references to 'the government' or 'the coalition' refer to the 2010-15 coalition. When originally funded, it was planned that this research would explore how welfare conditionality is experienced, contrasting its applicability in a range of policy contexts such as housing, welfare-to-work and within the 'troubled families' agenda. However, by Autumn 2010, following an Emergency Budget and publication of a welfare reform Green Paper, *21st Century Welfare* (DWP, 2010b; Osborne, 2010a), it had become clear that the coalition was intent on wide-ranging changes to the benefit system, which included significant reductions to both eligibility and levels of support provided. The further extension and intensification of welfare conditionality remained a critical part of the coalition's plans, but the logic for examining these in isolation needed to be reconsidered.

This study, therefore, was reconfigured to focus much more broadly on the overarching experiences of welfare reform, on 'getting by' on out-of-work benefits during times of welfare reform and significant changes to the 'welfare' offer. Critically, millions have been directly affected by benefit changes between 2010 and 2015, with those in paid work also affected by changes to tax credits and support with costs of housing. When the coalition entered office in May 2010, around five million working-age adults were in receipt of out-of-work benefits (Kenway et al., 2010, p.1). About 50 per cent were doing so because of disability or ill-health, 30 per cent due to unemployment and 20 per cent as a result of either being a carer and/or a single parent (2010, p.1). Almost all will have been affected by at least one, and in many cases several, of the government's changes to the social security offer.

In this study, a strong motivation for the researcher has been her desire to give voice to the individual lived experiences of those living on out-of-work benefits. Too often, these voices are silent and neglected in the constant noise and discussion about the most appropriate direction for welfare reform (Garthwaite, 2011). Although consultations are increasingly demanded and built into the policy process, there

remains an absence of active listening on the part of politicians and those in power (Walker, 2014), and it was a commitment to just such a listening, and then a sharing and dissemination of what was heard, that has driven and sustained this research.

1.3 Inclusion, exclusion and social citizenship

The absence of the voices of those directly affected by welfare reforms is just one example of the extent to which those who rely on benefits for all or most of their income are granted a lesser, devalued citizenship status. Social citizenship is inherently about membership, most often as a status attached to membership of the national community (Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2003). It is of value precisely because there are some that it excludes; it is always and inevitably about 'us' and 'them'. There is a rich theoretical history of exploring the relationships between poverty and citizenship status (cf. Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2004; Vincent, 1991), and there is an intuitive logic to employing ideas of social citizenship to frame and theoretically define this study. This thesis is centrally interested in the changing shape of social citizenship over time, and in particular the ways in which out-of-work benefits claimants' rights and responsibilities are both experienced and framed in policy rhetoric and approach.

By focusing on social citizenship, it is possible to consider questions of inclusion and exclusion, who is and who is not included in the citizenry and on what basis. There is scope to explore what is provided to those included as citizens and the nature and extent of protection offered via the social rights of citizenship. In this study, there is a focus on exploring different conceptualisations of citizenship, with a contrast drawn between citizenship *from above*, how it is framed and understood by politicians, and citizenship as it is lived and experienced *from below*. When Cameron talked about responsibility in his 2010 general election victory speech, he was talking about and developing his understanding of social citizenship, one which shows marked continuity with his New Labour predecessors in office (see Chapter 2). In Cameron's speech, and his subsequent policy direction and focus, we can unpick and disentangle a particular approach to social citizenship from above; and one with far-reaching consequences. This thesis explores the implications flowing from the dominant citizenship narrative adopted by Cameron's government. It should be noted that whilst discussion focuses on the coalition's citizenship narrative, this is understood as being shared by many mainstream politicians, as well as reflecting aspects of broader public discourse and popular understandings.

This thesis also considers citizenship as it is lived and experienced from below, with a particular interest in tracking the extent of the (mis)match between lived citizenship realities and the more dominant conceptions of citizenship. In following out-of-work benefit claimants over time, there has been scope to engage with their lived citizenship realities, particularly in terms of how they interpret and make sense of their rights, responsibilities and interactions with the welfare state. This enables a consideration of how social citizenship has changed in recent years, with a particular exploration of what - if anything - social citizenship rights now offer to those on out-of-work benefits. The research considers the ways in which the social citizenship of out-of-work claimants is potentially affected and marginalised by processes of welfare reform and struggles to 'get by' on out-of-work benefits during times of welfare reform.

The title of this thesis asks whether those who experience welfare reform are best characterised as irresponsible citizens who require activation to behave responsibly and do the 'right thing', generally by participating in paid work. This thesis problematises the assumed irresponsibility of out-of-work benefit claimants, and explores their varied, often complex, relationships with paid employment, benefit receipt and other forms of socially valuable contribution. It also considers how far and whether their perceived irresponsibility – regardless of the evidence to support this – serves to devalue and delegitimise their citizenship status, with the potential for profoundly exclusionary consequences. In this regard, there is an exploration of whether T H Marshall's observation of the nineteenth century Poor Law's treatment of 'the poor' has a contemporary relevance:

the Poor Law treated the claims of the poor, not as an integral part of the rights of the citizen, but as an alternative to them – as claims which could be met only if the claimants ceased to be citizens in any true sense of the word (1950 p.15).

Following the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, firm demarcations were created and enforced between those judged deserving and undeserving of support, with particularly harsh and degrading forms of 'support' meted out to those characterised as belonging to the 'able poor' (Charlesworth, 2010; Warren, 2005). Arguably, there are significant overlaps and points of continuity between the experiences of those living in poverty in nineteenth century Britain, and today (Lansley and Mack, 2015), particularly apparent in the citizenship exclusion of those relying on heavily stigmatised forms of assistance.

In exploring how far today's out-of-work benefit claimants experience citizenship in either inclusionary or exclusionary ways, this study seeks to flesh out the 'everyday world of citizenship' (Desforges et al., 2005, cited in Lister, 2007, p.58). At the same time, it also explores how far and whether empirical findings on lived citizenship experiences can generate new knowledge about how best to theorise and understand social citizenship (see Chapter 10). Throughout, citizenship is conceptualised as 'imparfaite' or unfinished (Balibar, 2001, cited in Clarke et al., 2014); it is constantly evolving and changing, being re-worked and re-imagined both in dominant narratives and through lived experiences. Arguably, it is this that gives citizenship its particular value as a theoretical construct, enabling researchers to track and explore how and in what ways it is conceptualised and experienced over time and, in so doing, better understand and document our changing social world.

1.4 Theoretical notes – on 'welfare', poverty and social exclusion, and agency

1.4.1 'Welfare'

In exploring social citizenship both as it is lived and conceptualised from above, there is necessarily an examination of ideas of 'welfare', poverty and social exclusion, and agency, and it is to a brief exploration of how these terms are understood and employed that this chapter now turns. As part of a broader narrative that constructs reliance on out-of-work benefits as inherently problematic, there has been a noticeable shift in terminology, with politicians and the media increasingly talking about 'welfare' rather than benefits or social security (Lister, 2011b). The Americanisation 'welfare' is employed in a narrow way to refer to forms of working-age social welfare provided to out-of-work claimants; it does not extend to or include provision such as pensions, education and health services nor, generally, in-work financial support such as tax credits. Politicians repeatedly talk about the need to reduce 'welfare' spending, as well as endlessly returning to what is characterised as a deep rooted and pernicious problem of 'welfare dependency' (cf. Cameron, 2010b; Duncan Smith, 2015; Osborne, 2013b). Later chapters will show how this analysis is tied to a particular characterisation of those who rely on out-of-work benefits for all or most of this income (see Chapters 3, 5-9), one which is not always supported by the empirical evidence.

In this thesis, reference will be made to 'welfare' only in describing government accounts and narratives, with the term social security preferred, or out-of-work benefits when referring explicitly to working-age benefits for those not currently in

paid employment. A narrow focus on 'welfare' serves to obscure the real nature of benefits reliance, and the reality that we are all, in various ways, dependent on the state for support. As Titmuss's Social Division of Welfare (SDW) thesis reminds us (1958), we are all welfare dependants if we understand 'welfare' to include not just social welfare, but the various forms of occupational and fiscal welfare also provided (which include benefits linked to employment and tax relief). There is also a fourth category of welfare - informal welfare - that feminist revisions have incorporated into the SDW (Mann, 2009; Rose, 1981). Informal welfare includes care for family members and friends, as well as the unpaid and often taken-for-granted forms of support on which so many rely (see Chapter 5). Importantly, however, social welfare has always been the most visible and most stigmatised form of welfare, giving Titmuss's arguments an enduring relevance (Mann, 2009; Sinfield, 1978). In the following analysis, there is an inevitable focus on the receipt of 'social welfare', but this is grounded in an awareness of a social division of welfare that envelops us all in various forms and divisions of 'welfare dependency' (Hills, 2015b; Mann, 2009; Sinfield, 1978).

1.4.2 Poverty and social exclusion

Given that poverty and out-of-work benefit receipt are intertwined, it is inevitable that, in studying benefit receipt, and changes to this benefit receipt over time, evidence will be generated that will provide insights into lived experiences of poverty (see Chapters 5&8). Many of the participants in this study were both relatively and absolutely poor, struggling with being able to afford very basic necessities as well as any 'luxuries' that many in society enjoy as a matter of course (see Chapter 5). Poverty is best conceptualised as a dynamic state (Walker and Leisering, 1998), people move in and out of poverty, often repeatedly, over time, variously experiencing persistent, transient or recurrent poverty (Smith and Middleton, 2007). In this study, the conceptual focus is firmly fixed on the experiences of being on out-of-work benefits, and the citizenship implications that flow from the current dominant policy direction and overarching narrative. The research reported here was not primarily an examination of the contemporary nature of poverty in Britain, which has been considered in recent contributions by other authors (cf. Daly and Kelly, 2015; Lansley and Mack, 2015). While attention is rightly paid to experiences of poverty among out-of-work benefit claimants (see Chapter 5), trends in poverty illustrate that it is a much wider phenomenon, affecting many of those in work, in retirement, as well as dependent children (Lansley and Mack, 2015; Macinnes et al., 2014).

For the purposes of this thesis, ideas of social in/exclusion are also pertinent, particularly given the extent to which they often map onto processes and experiences of citizenship in/exclusion. Much, of course, depends on how one defines social inclusion and it is important to note that the contemporary emphasis on paid employment as the marker of social inclusion is inevitably problematic (Levitas, 1998; Wright, 2015) (see Chapters 3, 5&6).

1.4.3 Agency

In exploring the lived experiences of welfare reform, this thesis is closely concerned with how individuals demonstrate and display personal agency, agency that is so often constrained and curtailed by the structural barriers they face. Importantly, too, out-of-work benefit claimants' exercise of agency is one that is closely monitored, policed and critiqued, with the policy framework implying that their behaviours and (in)activity are the primary explanations for their non-work and reliance on benefits (see Chapter 3). Historically, social policy analyses have been criticised for either focusing on structural forces to the neglect of agency, or - at the other extreme - concentrating on individual behaviours and actions without paying due attention to the ways in which these are shaped, enabled and constrained by the broader structural context (Lister, 2004; Williams and Popay, 1999). There are evidently risks around romanticising or over-emphasising individual agency (Lister, 2004; 2015a), particularly set against the context of an individualisation of responsibility, but it is nonetheless a critical area for social policy analysis. Drawing on the work of Lister (2004), Hoggett (2008; 2001) and Wright (2012), this thesis will seek to generate insights into how individuals navigate their daily lives on out-of-work benefits, a navigation that demonstrates both active agency, and the structural constraints – and occasionally opportunities – which individuals face. Out-of-work benefit claimants are conceptualised as 'creative reflexive welfare subjects' (Williams et al., 1999) who variously display active agency to a positive end, as well as making decisions and taking action that can have negative consequences and are destructive towards themselves or another (Frost and Hoggett, 2008; Hoggett, 2001).

Throughout, the understanding of agency adopted is one that emphasises its relational dimension – it is observed in our interaction with others (Lister, 2003) – and is rooted in these relationships. Focusing on this aspect of agency, Wright (2012) utilises the concept of 'intersubjectivity' to describe the construction of meaning and enaction of agency as collective practices involving both influencing others, and being influenced by others, often at the same time. Importantly, intersubjectivity:

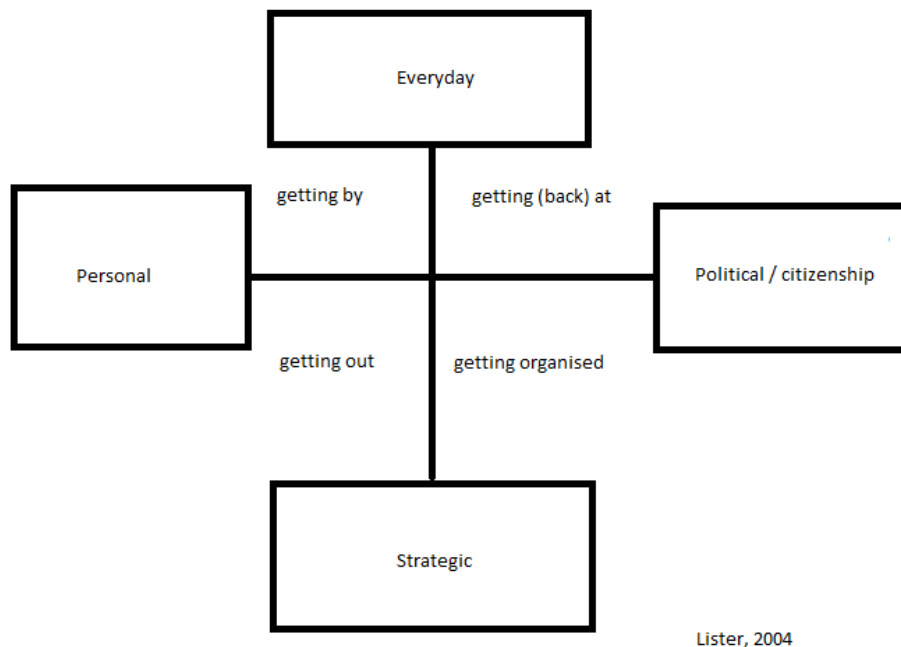
recognises the blurred boundaries between self and others, offering a view of agency as profoundly enmeshed with shared expectations and accomplished in everyday life through interaction (pp.317-8).

Alongside an emphasis on the extent to which agency is exercised and experienced relationally, it is critical to recognise the ways in which it is dynamic, fluid and changing, evolving over time (Neale, 2015, in press).

Of particular import given this thesis's focus on how individuals manage on out-of-work benefits, with the poverty this almost inevitably entails, is Lister's (2004) work on the agency of those living in poverty. Lister develops a typology which shows the everyday and strategic agency of those living in poverty. This typology can be applied to the particular experiences of out-of-work benefits receipt, a change in focus that does not necessitate any change to the four quadrants (see Figure 1).

Lister draws a distinction between what she describes as everyday activities, about managing in poverty, and those that are more strategic, such as deciding whether to accept an offer of paid employment. She also distinguishes between personal expressions of agency and those which are more political and hint at a form of citizenship engagement, such as organising to challenge the circumstances of living in poverty (2004). In this study, there is a particular focus on the personal expressions of agency, with substantial discussion of what 'getting by' on benefits entails (see Chapter 5), as well as explorations of individuals' various efforts, and occasional successes, in trying to 'get out' of their reliance on out-of-work benefits (see Chapter 6). There is also discussion of the limited evidence found of individuals 'getting organised' (see Chapter 8).

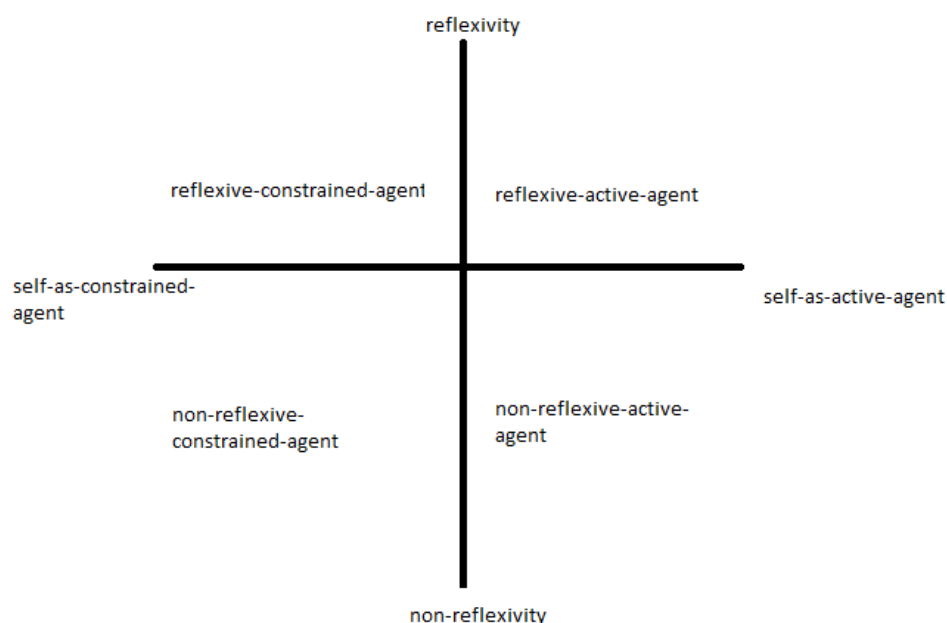
Figure 1 Lister's typology of agency, applied to out-of-work benefit claimants



This thesis also draws upon Hoggett's (2001) exploration of reflexivity and agency. Hoggett illustrates how reflexivity is still possible when one is relatively unable to exercise agency, and how, similarly, it is possible to demonstrate 'non-reflexive agency'. He proposes a typology to illustrate the various possible combinations of both the absence and presence of reflexivity and agency. Hoggett draws particular attention to those he calls 'reflexive objects'; reflexive yet relatively powerless individuals; and highlights how a reflective engagement with one's own constrained position can lead to feelings of powerlessness, anger and despair. This analysis has particular relevance to the case of out-of-work benefit claimants, as later discussion will demonstrate (see Chapters 7&8). It should be noted that reflexive thought, especially where this contributes to the development of narratives of the self, and implicit resistance to dominant portrayals, is usually understood as an exercise of human agency. For present purposes, though, it is nonetheless interesting to consider the ways in which those whose agency is relatively constrained demonstrate reflexive thought (and action) and how this then impacts upon and affects them.

In the following analysis, Hoggett’s typology of reflexivity and agency is adopted, but in modified form. Rather than think of a continuum from self-as-agent to self-as-object, as Hoggett does, a continuum from self-as-constrained-agent to self-as-active agent is proposed. This illustrates how people face varying degrees of constraint on their agency but that – even for those who face the greatest structural constraints and barriers – there are still opportunities for and evidence of the exercise of agency (see modified typology, Figure 2).

Figure 2 Reflexivity and agency



Adapted from Hoggett, 2001

It is tempting to try to aggregate Hoggett and Lister’s typologies, and to explore the dynamic relationships between agency, reflexivity and the personal and political domains. However, both typologies do important work on their own, and trying to develop one overarching framework is both messy and – at least in the attempts of this researcher – unworkable. It is worth noting, nonetheless, that the activities of Lister’s quadrants can be variously both reflexive and non-reflexive, and can also include activities that worsen as well as improve individuals’ circumstances.

1.5 Researching through time

By interviewing people on more than one occasion, this study enabled a dynamic picture to emerge of how individual out-of-work benefit claimants were affected by welfare reforms, changes which often impacted on their constrained agency, and which often necessitated active agency as part of their continued struggles to ‘get by’

(see Chapters 5&7). Qualitative longitudinal researchers emphasise that, in researching over and through time, it is critical to think about time both as a vehicle and topic for study (Henwood and Shirani, 2012; Neale, 2015, in press) (see Chapter 4). Time is an invaluable vehicle of study, particularly useful in efforts to better understand responses to and consequences of changes to policy (Corden and Millar, 2007b). In adopting a qualitative longitudinal approach, the picture developed is a richer, more textured one than that gathered by the static snapshot obtained through a single interview at one point of time (Ellwood, 1998; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003).

In developing this study, attention was paid to how best to theorise time and the temporal. Neale (2015, in press) draws on the work of Adam (1990) to show how social research is typically orientated around an understanding of 'clock time', of time as fixed and bounded by the clock, calendar and cycles of nature. While this research is governed by this traditional understanding of time, there is also recognition of the scope to move beyond this towards an exploration of temporality, of time as plural and varied, emerging from and based in our subjectively defined and experienced events and practices (2015, in press). In this study, there is a particular focus on understanding and charting the fluidity of the past and future, and how these are constructed and shaped by an ever-shifting and changing present. Attention is paid to the ways in which the welfare state shapes the temporal order of individual lives (Leisering and Walker, 1998), with particular relationships between out-of-work benefit receipt and people's capacity to make plans and think about the future (see Chapters 5,7,9).

The future is identified as a particularly rich terrain, given that it is here that people can imagine the other lives that they would like to lead, as well as exploring their hopes and fears of how their unknown future might unfold (Henderson et al., 2012; Neale et al., 2012). This study includes repeated discussions of participants' imagined futures, discussions that show how these develop and evolve in response to changes in individuals' present circumstances, and personal orientations and preoccupations. These imagined futures can play a critical role in (sometimes) helping sustain individuals with the hard work of managing in a difficult present (see Chapter 5). Exploring individuals' evolving and shifting futures reveals how the future is variously:

projected, pictured, planned, promised, pursued, performed, prospected, produced and [perhaps inevitably] polluted (Adam, 2008, p.11).

Researching through time has proved an invaluable methodological approach, with great potential in exploring individual responses to social policy interventions and

reforms. Proceeding longitudinally was closely tied to the objective of this research to explore experiences of welfare reforms over time, and it is important to now explore the overarching research questions of this study.

1.6 Research questions and objectives

In this thesis, a policy focus on welfare reform and measures to 'activate' individuals into paid employment is married to a broader exploration of the experiences of relying on out-of-work benefits over time, and how this is situated in people's past, imagined futures and contested present. Throughout, the empirical analysis is rooted in a broader concern with ideas of social citizenship and a consideration of both the citizenship implications of the research findings, as well as what conceptual insight they contribute to improving our understandings of how citizenship is experienced and made meaningful.

The central research question is:

How do out-of-work benefit recipients experience and respond to processes of welfare reform over time?

This is accompanied by a number of subsidiary research questions:

1. What is the current climate and policy focus of welfare reform and how is this interpreted by out-of-work benefit claimants themselves?
2. How is welfare reform experienced by those reliant on social welfare?
3. What are the relationships between out-of-work benefit receipt, paid employment and other forms of unpaid contribution?
4. How do out-of-work benefit recipients see themselves and others during times of welfare reform?
5. How far do the individual lived experiences of out-of-work benefit claimants fit with the dominant narratives on 'welfare'?
6. What are the implications of this for social citizenship?

Overall, then, this study seeks to generate new knowledge and understanding with regard to the lived experiences of out-of-work benefit recipients during a time of welfare reform. It should be noted that whilst the experiences of out-of-work benefit receipt can be differentiated according to age, gender, ethnicity and disability, teasing out these differences, and understanding them, has not been a goal of this study. Instead, there is a focus on individual narratives, highlighting both commonality and diversity in experiences of, and responses to, welfare reform.

1.7 Structure of thesis

This thesis looks first to citizenship as it is conceptualised from above, before turning to an exploration of how citizenship is lived and experienced from below. In Chapter 2, the theoretical framing of social citizenship is introduced, with an exploration of T H Marshall's classic theory of social citizenship. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the citizenship narratives adopted and appropriated firstly by New Labour and then by the coalition. Chapter 3 broadens this discussion to consider the policy approach taken, and the particular measures adopted in reforming social security over the past 35 years. Given the concerns of this study, there is a necessary focus on the policy measures adopted by the coalition, although this is situated in its historical context, with the parallels with the policy programmes of previous governments demonstrated.

The methodological choices made in researching lived experiences of welfare reform over time are then discussed and defended, with Chapter 4 including reflexive discussion of particular ethical issues and dilemmas encountered during the research journey. This chapter emphasises the rich potential in qualitative longitudinal research, a methodology with untapped scope for developing new insight into experiences of policy interventions.

Chapters 5 – 9 outline the empirical findings from this study, highlighting how citizenship is lived and experienced from below during times of welfare reform. Chapter 5 is focused on introducing the sample, and discussing their past, present and imagined future lives, and how these are shaped and constrained by their reliance on out-of-work benefits. This chapter also explores the work that 'getting by' on benefits demands, as well as the various forms of contribution in which so many of the participants were engaged. Chapter 6 considers the participants' relationships with paid employment over time, detailing both movements in and out of work during the research, as well as experiences of engaging with programmes of welfare-to-work support and interventions from Job Centre Plus. This chapter explores the values and orientations towards paid employment within the sample, and considers how far and whether these fit with a dominant portrayal of individuals who need activation and encouragement to make the welfare-to-work transition. Chapter 7 provides a detailed exploration of experiences of welfare reform, highlighting how individuals are variously affected by the increased conditionality regime and changes in eligibility for disability benefits. Participants' own attitudes to the welfare reforms are explored in Chapter 8, which is also concerned with questions of out-of-work claimants' identity; how they see themselves and others during a time of welfare

state retrenchment. In concluding the empirical analysis, a brief chapter (Chapter 9) considers how far individuals' aspirations were met in the course of the study, and draws out three contrasting dynamic journeys from amongst the longitudinal sample.

Chapter 10 concludes this thesis, with a summary of the main arguments and a discussion of the citizenship implications that flow from examining the lived experiences of welfare reform. This conclusion asks what, if any, emancipatory potential remains for social citizenship, and explores the ways in which social citizenship is currently operating for those at the sharp end of welfare reform. The policy implications of the study's central findings are also discussed, as are the theoretical implications for how we might better understand and capture the nature of social citizenship in twenty first century Britain. This chapter re-emphasises a central thread that runs throughout this thesis – the value and import of listening and giving voice to the real experts on welfare reform and social exclusion – out-of-work benefit claimants themselves.

Chapter 2 Citizenship from above: theories of social citizenship and the dominant citizenship narratives of New Labour and the coalition

2.1 Introduction

Central to any discussion of the changing role of the state in relation to welfare provision is the concept of citizenship, both as a status attributed to individual members of society and as a social practice involving participation and governance (Dean, 1999 p.213).

In theoretically grounding this empirical study of the lived experiences of welfare reform, there is a conceptual logic to drawing on theories of social citizenship. Critically concerned with ideas of inclusion and exclusion, and the relationships between individuals and the state (Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2003), citizenship theories attend to the central questions of normative social policy. Tracking changing ideas of social citizenship enables us to observe shifting trends in welfare entitlement, citizens' rights and responsibilities and related questions of desert, need and what constitutes 'fair' provision. It is often possible to map particular understandings of who counts as a citizen and what claims citizens can justly make on the state onto governmental discourses and rhetoric. During a period of welfare reform, citizenship can be employed as a theoretical lens through which to explore changes in the social rights to welfare, as well as in the belonging and inclusion of those relying on out-of-work benefits for all or most of their income.

The central tasks of this chapter are twofold. Firstly, the chapter introduces the theoretical terrain of social citizenship, with a particular focus on the work of T H Marshall. Secondly, the chapter critically explores the citizenship theories drawn upon - explicitly or implicitly - in the policies introduced and the rhetoric deployed by the New Labour and coalition administrations, looking at liberal and civic republican ideas in turn. A review of recent literature exploring the changing shape of social citizenship in the UK over recent years is then provided. Overall, this chapter demonstrates why attending to ideas of social citizenship has value, while also outlining the dominant citizenship narratives of recent UK governments.

2.2 The theoretical lens of social citizenship

2.2.1 What is citizenship and why does it matter

Citizenship is best understood as denoting membership of a community (Marshall, 1950), and in this context we are most interested in membership of the nation state,

and the rights and responsibilities which are attached to that membership. The very value of citizenship lies in its bounded nature; membership of the citizenry grants an individual certain rights and privileges not awarded to those excluded from the citizenship community (Lister, 2003). It is inherently exclusive, and is a status of value precisely because there will always be those not included as citizens (Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2003) (see Chapter 1). As a site of inclusion/exclusion, matters of social justice and fairness relate closely to the central concerns of citizenship (Lewis, 1998; White, 2003). Determining who should be treated as a citizen, what citizens should be entitled to from the state, and what should be expected in return, demands recourse to normative issues of justice.

Citizenship is not an absolute and static state, instead the boundaries between citizen and non-citizen are often fluid and changing (Clarke et al., 2014), while there are always people who – although nominally citizens – experience their citizenship status as precarious and sometimes find themselves treated as lesser or second class citizens (Dwyer, 2010). People can and will experience their citizenship status and practices differently at different times, often related to the extent and nature of their engagement and participation in wider society, whether it be as workers, parents, volunteers or carers. Furthermore, citizenship is not an all or nothing status but, as Lister (2003) suggests, a continuum, with people moving along it depending on the norms, expectations and demands imposed on ‘citizens’ from above. This has particular import in exploring how individuals experience and respond to changes in their social security entitlement, changes which impact upon what it means ‘to be a citizen’ (Lister, 2003) (see Chapters 5-9). The ways in which a government defines and operationalises the social rights and responsibilities of its citizens, as well as their overarching conception of citizenship, inevitably impact on who is included and excluded within the citizenry.

Lister (2003) draws attention to the relational nature of citizenship participation, as well as its continually contested, shifting and changing nature, something also highlighted by Clarke et al (2014). Citizenship has been, and remains, a ‘keyword’ because it is employed in justifications of very different political programmes and ideas, where it is utilised as a ‘powerful mobilising image for social and political action’ (Clarke et al., 2014, p.84). As mentioned above, Balibar conceptualises citizenship as ‘imparfaite’ – unfinished, and constantly in dispute, both in theory and practice (2001, cited in Clarke et al., 2014). It is an essentially contested concept, and a mobile one, meaning different things to different people at different times.

2.2.2 Liberal and civic republication theories of citizenship

In exploring theories of citizenship, an important distinction can be made between liberal and civic republican traditions of citizenship (Plant, 1998), which can also be understood as a distinction between social-contractual and social-solidaristic thinking (Dean and Melrose, 1999). Whilst the former are more focused on citizenship as a status that brings with it particular rights, the latter are concerned more with citizenship as a practice and thus tend to concentrate on the responsibilities and duties of the 'good' citizen (Dwyer, 2010).

Within the liberal tradition (cf. Kymlicka, 1995; Marshall, 1950; Rawls, 1999; White, 2003), theorists conceptualise the individual citizen as the bearer of individual rights and preferences – placing stress on the importance of upholding the individual's freedom to pursue the life of his or her choosing (Dwyer, 2010). Generally, individual freedom is prioritised over the state dictating the form which a 'good' life should take, creating a key dividing line between these thinkers and those writing from within the civic republican tradition. The liberal citizenship tradition has also been described as 'social-contractual', as theorists take as their starting point the idea of a social contract between the individual citizen and the state. Thus, citizenship is most frequently explored as a status to which is attached a bundle of rights and responsibilities – the terms of the contract between the individual and his state.

Social-solidaristic theories of citizenship can be equated with civic republican and communitarian conceptualisations (Dean and Melrose, 1999). In both, a particular stress is put on citizenship as a practice, with attention paid to the individual's assumed loyalty to the state and the shared values held by the citizenry as a whole (cf. Sandel, 1998; Taylor, 1990; Walzer, 1983). New communitarian thinking is best understood as a particular, often conservative, strand of the broader civic republican citizenship tradition. Communitarians put a particular stress on the expected behaviour of the 'good' citizen, with their policy prescriptions often centring on demanding and instilling individual responsibility and duty (cf. Etzioni, 1997; Willetts, 2008). There is a strong behavioural and moralising dimension to the communitarian perspective, with responsibilities seen as arising prior to, and often irrespective of, rights (Lister, 2003). Today, communitarian thinking remains prominent in both academic and political discourses, a legacy of the long tradition of civic republicanism stretching right back to Ancient Greece and the onus there placed on active participation in the 'polis' (Dwyer, 2010).

Frequently, and particularly in communitarian theories of citizenship, there is also a dichotomy evident, whether explicitly or implicitly, which demarcates the good and

the bad citizen; drawing a contrast between the individual who is performing the role and tasks of a well-functioning member of society and those who do not behave as desired. Increasingly, these demarcations tend to operate to exclude or devalue the citizenship of those reliant on social welfare, whose non-engagement in paid employment is characterised as a failure to contribute to society and thus to fulfil the duties of citizenship. Having very briefly outlined ideas of social citizenship, this chapter will now explore the liberal theory of citizenship developed by Marshall, before discussing evidence of both contractualist and new communitarian thinking in recent governments' conceptualisation of citizenship.

2.2.3 T H Marshall: citizenship as 'equality of status'

T H Marshall developed the classic egalitarian liberal conception of citizenship (Bode, 2008; Dwyer, 2010), emphasising the equality of status of all citizens:

Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respects to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed (Marshall, 1950, p.18).

Taking a chronological perspective, Marshall charted the emergence of civil, political and social rights of citizenship in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively. For our purposes, we are particularly interested in Marshall's conceptualisation of the social rights of citizenship. Unfortunately, however, Marshall did not explicitly detail the nature and extent of the social rights to which a citizen should be entitled, defining them in both minimalist and maximalist terms as:

...the whole range [of social rights] from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security, to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the civilized life according to the standards prevailing in society (Marshall, 1950, p.8).

Much debate since has focused on Marshall's interpretation of the extent of social rights and how far these should be providing unconditionally (Dwyer, 2004b). In this context, what is most important is that Marshall saw social rights as an essential part of the social citizenship offer, with citizenship seen as 'offering something of substance for those in poverty' (Dwyer, 2004c p.83). This conceptualisation of social citizenship provides the possibility for citizenship to be used instrumentally when making claims on the state. Marshall's (1950) model can operate as a yardstick against which we can measure and assess a society's current state of social citizenship, and, in particular, how far all citizens obtain the promised 'security' and 'equality of status'. Lister (1990; 2004) and Vincent (1991), for example, have demonstrated the ways in which living in poverty impinges upon affected individuals'

citizenship, noting how all three types of rights go largely unrealised for those living in poverty, who experience a diminished citizenship. Indeed, Vincent argues that 'properly understood a poor citizen is a contradiction in terms' (1991, p.205).

As well as offering something of real value to those living in poverty, Marshall's tripartite model illustrated how civil, political and social rights are inevitably intertwined, such that the denial of one category of rights will affect and limit an individual's capacity to exercise their other rights, what Twine (1994) described as the 'three legged stool of citizenship'. Further, even in his minimalist definition of social citizenship rights Marshall placed emphasis on the right to at least a 'modicum' of 'economic security' and, notwithstanding the 'modicum' qualifier, this right to an element of security is a relatively challenging benchmark against which to assess current social security provision and reforms.

Marshall's concern with rights has led some critics to suggest he neglected the responsibilities of the individual (Etzioni, 1995; Selbourne, 1994), a charge which has also been made of the post-war period right up to 1979 (Deacon, 2002). However, Marshall (1950) does stress the responsibilities of individuals – placing particular emphasis on the importance of paid employment and the duty of citizens to live the life of a 'good citizen' and to put 'one's heart into one's job'. Nonetheless, he did not explicitly codify the duties and obligations which citizens should be expected to fulfil, and in this regard he was far more focused on the rights of citizenship. Marshall's citizenship theory has also been criticised for a faulty chronology and, in particular, a neglect of the reality that women's political rights came much later than his model suggests (Delanty, 2000; Walby, 1994). This, when combined with a further neglect of issues of disability and gender (Revi, 2014; Roulstone and Prideaux, 2012), has led some critics to argue that his citizenship model was only ever designed to focus on healthy, white, adult males (Dwyer, 2010; Williams, 1992). However, it is vital to remember that Marshall was writing at a particular time, in a particular cultural context, with his model inevitably bound up in the emergence of the welfare state during Clement Attlee's post-war government (Bottomore, 1992).

Almost seventy years on, Marshall's tripartite model of social citizenship remains valuable in incorporating social citizenship rights and providing a structure which can be mobilised in defending social welfare. By popularising social citizenship and calling on the state to provide some level of de-commodified support to citizens in need, Marshall developed a contractual model which places comparatively onerous demands on the state. The ambiguities in Marshall's writing – particularly around his understanding of the nature and extent of social rights – limit the utility of his ideas. Nonetheless, social citizenship can operate as an ideological discourse (Dean and

Melrose, 1999) and Marshall's emphasis on social rights has real resonance when exploring the nature and consequences of welfare reform. For the purposes of this research, Marshall's classic egalitarian liberal theory of social citizenship is particularly useful when contrasted with both the dominant citizenship narratives of recent governments and out-of-work claimants' own lived citizenship realities.

2.2.4 Social citizenship and participation

Since Marshall's seminal account, there has been ongoing debate regarding what, if anything, social citizenship offers to the poorest in society, a debate which has operated alongside questions regarding what a more egalitarian and socially just social citizenship might entail. In moving towards a post-Marshallian framework for an egalitarian and truly inclusive social citizenship, writers such as Lister (2003; 2004), Fraser (2009), Williams (2012a) and Taylor (1994) have emphasised the importance of looking beyond access to rights and resources towards questions of participation, recognition, respect and voice. Indeed, while such writers all contend that meaningful access to resources is a vital pre-condition of social citizenship, they also put emphasis on ensuring that all citizens have the right to be treated with respect and dignity, and to have their individual needs and preferences recognised, through a politics of recognition. This becomes particularly pertinent for the poorest of society who often find their voices ignored, and even silenced, while their interactions with state bureaucracies and street level advisers are frequently characterised by an absence of respect (see Chapter 6).

Having the right to give 'voice' to individual experiences and perspectives is closely tied to a right to participate in society. This right is itself - of course - entirely contingent on the right to access those resources to be able to participate fully in society. Fraser (2003) has written of the importance of seeking to secure 'parity of participation' so that all have equal rights to participate, a demanding objective in current western societies where the poorest typically find it very difficult to participate, particularly in proactive, positive ways (see Chapter 5). For a right to participate to be meaningful it would need to encompass both familial and community forms of participation as well as the ability to participate in political decision making, particularly in those decisions which impact directly upon one's own life. Taken together then, it is possible to extend Marshall's framework to include not just social, political and civil citizenship rights but also participation rights, incorporating issues of respect, voice and recognition. This represents a demanding framework, and one against which individual lived experiences can be measured and compared. Having introduced ideas of social citizenship, this chapter now turns to

an exploration of the dominant citizenship narratives discernible in the policies and rhetoric of recent governments, looking particularly at the period from 1997-2015.

2.3 Sustaining the liberal tradition

2.3.1 The dominance of contractualist rhetoric

When making the case for welfare reform, both New Labour and the coalition have employed contractualist arguments, frequently promoting their new policies as ‘fair’ measures designed to ensure that people’s rights and responsibilities are *both* upheld (cf. Department for Social Security, 1998; DWP, 2008a; DWP, 2010c). Evidently, there is a neat symmetry to contractualist pronouncements, with a bundle of rights and privileges matched to related duties and responsibilities. Even if this symmetry is in fact a mirage, the value of contractualism lies in its apparent appeal to ideas of justice as reciprocity, with the tying of entitlement to contribution. Thus, it is not surprising to find contractualism so readily and repeatedly deployed – a deployment that has a long history. From the Thatcher era’s critique of the post-war welfare settlement’s surfeit of individual rights and deficit of personal responsibility (Moore, 1988), to Cameron’s promise to reconfigure the welfare ‘bargain’ (2009), there has been a remarkably consistent focus on defining the appropriate relationship between rights and responsibilities in a functioning welfare state.

Politicians have repeatedly argued that with more support from the state must come more responsibilities, with the latter most often narrowly construed as taking steps to find and enter paid employment (Conservatives, 2008; Conservatives, 2009; Department for Social Security, 1998). Blair’s government promised to reform the welfare state “...on the basis of a new contract between citizen and state” (Department for Social Security, 1998, p.v) to create “...rights and responsibilities on all sides” (1998, p.24) whilst the Conservatives pledged that “everyone who is able to work will be expected to prepare to return to work, and in return we will offer them the support they need to do so” (2009, p.5). It is worth noting that Cameron’s Conservatives repeatedly borrow the language and soundbites of their predecessors in government. Thus, 12 years after New Labour’s formative Green Paper ‘A new contract for welfare’ (Department for Social Security, 1998), the Conservatives published a pre-election policy paper on welfare-to-work; ‘A new welfare contract’ (Conservatives, 2010b). Similarly, the idea of a ‘something for something’ culture where support is explicitly tied to obligations is a rhetorical device employed by both New Labour and the Conservatives (Cameron, 2014b; DWP, 2008a; Hansard (Commons); Purnell, 2008).

Recourse to contractualist rhetoric is particularly evident in discussions of the relationship between out-of-work benefit claimants and the state. Indeed, it is in making a contractual case for deepening and extending welfare conditionality that the rights and responsibilities equation most frequently appears. With welfare-to-work in particular, we see the contractual citizenship perspective explicitly tied to policy, with Labour's New Deal arrangements being the classic example of a populist policy founded on, and justified in relation to, welfare contractualism (Fairclough, 2000 cited in Dean, 2002). Thus, Gordon Brown defended the New Deal regime, which included the offer of more support to unemployed people, alongside the condition to participate or risk benefit sanctions, on the basis of increasing both rights and obligations in tandem (DWP, 2008b). Similarly, the reforms announced in the 2010 welfare reform White Paper (Welfare that Works) justified a marked extension of work-related conditionality in contractualist terms (DWP, 2010c).

Taking the contractualist rhetoric further, and embedding it in policy and practice, the coalition has introduced a 'Claimant Commitment' in order to lay down exactly what is expected of each benefit recipient and the possible sanctions for failure to comply with their side of the welfare bargain (DWP, 2014d). Showing marked continuity with the Job Seeker's Allowance Agreement introduced by John Major in 1994, Universal Credit will require all claimants to sign and comply with their individual Claimant Commitment as a condition of ongoing benefit receipt. This extends the Jobseeker's Allowance Agreement to a broader group of benefit claimants (including, for example, single parents and disabled people) and is best conceptualised as a way of creating, and demanding, the fulfilment of a 'welfare contract'. David Cameron explicitly described the Claimant Commitment as a written contract:

Now you have to sign a contract that says: you do your bit and we'll do ours. It requires you to have a real CV and it makes clear: you have to seek work and take work – or you will lose your benefit (2012b, unpaginated).

A tension in recent governments' utilisation of contractualism relates to how far contractual arrangements are applied equally to all citizens, or alternatively are focused primarily on out-of-work benefit claimants who are seen to require activation, conditions and a quasi-explicit contract to get off welfare and into work. Arguably, an authoritarian contractual regime, which ties social welfare rights to state-defined responsibilities extends only to benefit claimants with the working (and rich) population escaping these conditions and expectations. It could be argued that those not claiming out-of-work benefits due to being in employment are already meeting the terms of the contract and are thus encompassed within a broader contractualist regime. However, the reality is that rich non-workers are able to

escape the stigma of unemployment and inactivity with their wealth operating as a convenient smokescreen for their non-participation in the formal labour market. What is more, those with the necessary wealth and resources can *choose* whether or not to engage in paid employment, a choice wholly denied to those who must meet the work-related conditions of benefit receipt.

The determined focus on the obligations of social welfare benefit claimants, and tacit ignoring of the obligations of individuals higher up the income scale, points to a certain lop-sidedness in the citizen contract as conceptualised and, importantly, converted into policy by recent governments. It can be characterised as part of a particular social division of social control, which sees the poorest subject to conditions and punitive interventions, while those higher up the income chain are only encouraged to behave differently via the occasional nudge (Harrison and Sanders, 2014). This relates closely to Wacquant's idea of a centaur state, a descriptor he applies to the USA but one with evident cross-over to the UK:

a centaur state, liberal at the top and paternalistic at the bottom...presents radically different faces at the two ends of the social hierarchy: a comely and caring visage towards the middle and upper classes, and a fearsome and frowning mug towards the lower class (Wacquant, 2009, p.312).

Under the coalition, there has been a growing reliance on ideas of behavioural economics – particularly nudge theory – to try to encourage those higher up the income chain to behave as the government would like. This has occurred alongside the extension and intensification of welfare conditionality for those on out-of-work benefits (Harrison and Sanders, 2014; Pykett, 2014) (see Chapter 3). This inequity in conditionality's implementation, with it disproportionately targeted at the poorest of society, contributes to questions regarding its fairness (White, 2003; White, 2004a). It also adds to the extent to which conditionality feeds into, and is itself part of, processes that exclude and problematise those who rely on benefits for all or most of their income.

Certainly, when leading politicians talk of the rights and, more frequently, the responsibilities of individual citizens their focus is most often on out-of-work benefit claimants who need corrective action to become active and dutiful (read working) citizens. Often, the contract is presented in fairly threatening terms and operates as an instrument of control and coercion. As Gordon Brown put it:

...those who are fit to work are expected to work. And those who cheat the system will not be warned, but punished the first time they are caught...If you won't contribute to our society, and fail to play by its rules, then you can't

expect to be supported by it (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008, p.3).

Whilst policy reforms are presented in contractual terms, as a binding of rights and entitlements to duties and obligations, the onus is most often placed on the responsibilities side of the equation, particularly under the coalition. While New Labour did sometimes speak in terms of individual rights, under the coalition there is a marked rhetorical focus on personal responsibility and a comparative absence of explorations of citizenship rights (Lister, 2011a). This focus on personal responsibility is part of a broader trend to characterise the 'problems' of poverty and unemployment as grounded in individuals' behaviour and 'irresponsibility', with a related neglect of wider structural issues such as the availability of jobs and the accessibility of good, affordable child care (Newman, 2011; Patrick, 2014a).

2.3.2 Differentiated contractualism

In an interesting development, Iain Duncan Smith, then Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions, used his speech at the 2010 Conservative Party Conference to set out his contract with the British people. Extracts from his speech are worth quoting at length, given that they demonstrate how he envisaged the government's contract with three key sectors of the British people, differentiated by their relationship to the labour market:

Today I want to set out the role I see for government in welfare. I want to set out a welfare contract...

We will break down the barriers to work and ensure work pays but in return, we have the right to insist that when work is available you take that work and work hard to keep that job...We will work with you but you must work with us. That is our contract with the unemployed.

It is a proud duty to provide financial security to the most vulnerable members of society and this will not change. This is our contract with the most vulnerable.

Most people in this country don't wake up early in the dark and cold, and head to their job in order for the state to take their money and waste it. They don't slump, exhausted in their chair after work, just to see their taxes spent on people who can work but won't. I want to look every taxpayer in the eye and be able to say that their money is either going to people who are on the path back to independence or...to people who, without question, deserve society's

care. No more spend and waste. This is our contract with British taxpayers (2010a, unpaginated).

Tax paying citizens are judged to be fulfilling their side of the welfare bargain, and so are exempt from the conditionality framework until and unless they too become reliant on out-of-work benefits. By contrast, those seen to have some capability to work are subject to the full force of welfare conditionality, and a regime of conditions and sanctions which is becoming increasingly stringent and severe. A residual category of those judged as 'deserving' and 'vulnerable' are promised protection and security, promises which need to be critically interrogated given the continued retrenchment in social welfare provision.

Duncan Smith's presentation of these differentiated welfare contracts can be related back to David Cameron's own speech at the same party conference in which he set out his particular conception of fairness, most importantly stating that: 'what people deserve depends upon how they behave' (2010d). Essentially, Duncan Smith's contracts are a re-working of Cameron's idea of fairness, both placing emphasis on individual behaviour, responsibilities and duties. As always, however, the rich are largely protected with their obligations studiously neglected. Differentiated forms of welfare contractualism are notable in providing a framework that justifies differential treatment of citizens, with a scale of conditionality and interventions depending on their distance from, and capability to participate in, the paid labour market.

Contracts, such as Duncan Smith's above, take a static uni-dimensional perspective on an individual's obligations and rights, and neglect to consider how a person's rights and responsibilities might be better thought of as being spread over the life course. In more recent government speeches (Cameron, 2012b; Cameron, 2014b; Duncan Smith, 2012c), we have seen a continued focus on the welfare contract between state and out-of-work claimants, a contract that is single-mindedly pursued, and often seems to be the sole focus of efforts to detail and enforce ideas of a social contract between state and citizen.

2.3.3 The 'contract' between taxpayers and out-of-work claimants

Duncan Smith's speech, quoted above, detailed the obligation the state owes to taxpayers to ensure their hard earned wages are not 'wasted' on 'people who can work but won't' (2010, unpaginated). In this way, Duncan Smith created a link between the rights of taxpayers to see their taxes well spent and the obligations of out-of-work claimants to 'work' for their welfare and to demonstrate and prove their deservingness. In this, and other pronouncements, there is some evidence of a re-working of the contractual idea, so that we begin to see a particular exploration of the

relationship not just between the individual and the state, but between and amongst fellow citizens. In particular, there are some undertones of a 'welfare contract' being implicitly drawn between the non-working 'welfare dependants' and the responsible taxpayer (Whitworth and Griggs, 2013). In a recent speech, George Osborne, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, defended reforms to increase the welfare conditionality faced by the economically inactive in a way that seemed to suggest a contractual relationship between out-of-work claimants and taxpayers:

Help to work, incentives to work, and an expectation that people should do everything they can to find work. That's fair for people out of work, and fair for those in work that pay for them. (2013a, unpaginated)

In a similar vein, Duncan Smith characterised the Claimant Commitment as creating a contract, not between the state and the citizen, but between the out-of-work claimant and the taxpayer:

Under Universal Credit we are...requiring everyone to sign up to a claimant commitment as a condition of entitlement to benefit. Just as those in work have obligations to their employer, much like a contract, this commitment will clearly set out claimants' obligations to the taxpayer (Duncan Smith, 2012b, unpaginated).

The notion of a contract between taxpayer and 'welfare dependants' as thus conceptualised is profoundly divisive; valorising the behaviours of the taxpayer, while suggesting that those reliant on benefits require conditions and the threat of compulsion to be made responsible, and to fulfil the obligations they owe their fellow citizens. This analysis almost explicitly creates a two-tiered citizenship; pitting citizens against one another with taxpayers awarded an elevated citizenship status as overseers who can make demands on out-of-work benefit claimants by virtue of their working, tax paying status. By contrast, out-of-work claimants must do what is expected of them or risk tough benefit sanctions, with almost no discussion of their rights under any such 'welfare contract'.

The above discussion has demonstrated a sustained reliance by post-1997 governments on a highly contractual liberal conceptualisation of citizenship, targeted particularly at out-of-work benefit claimants. The language of welfare contractualism is extensively utilised in efforts to detail the duties of out-of-work benefit claimants. However, it is very rarely employed to reinforce and uphold the rights of these same individuals. Indeed, we can begin to characterise the liberal contractualism evident in Britain today as being inegalitarian and authoritarian in nature. Dean's (2002) description of the New Labour regime as exhibiting an essentially contractarian form

of moral authoritarianism can also be applied to the actions and pronouncements of the coalition. At the level of rhetoric, at least, politicians repeatedly talk in terms of a reciprocal relationship between the state and its citizens. How far the political parties actually subscribe to contractualist arguments is, however, questionable, particularly where these stress comparatively onerous responsibilities which the state must first meet before it can require obligations of its citizens (cf, White, 2003). The suggestion that the contractual device is primarily utilised to control and compel out-of-work benefit claimants to fulfil state-defined obligations means this citizenship tradition may here operate in a profoundly exclusionary manner – serving to demarcate and target those deemed to require state intervention to behave as they should. This exclusionary tendency is only heightened when married to recent governments’ articulation of a communitarian citizenship perspective which places emphasis on the duty of all adults to engage in paid employment in order to fulfil the primary obligation of the good citizen.

2.4 Civic republican ideas

2.4.1 The working, dutiful citizen

The reliance on a liberal, contractual citizenship perspective is targeted primarily at setting the terms of the contract between the state and the out-of-work benefit claimant. The civic republican strand of citizenship theorising evident in the thinking of New Labour and the coalition is most marked in relation to their effort to reconstruct the welfare state around the work ethic. As Tyler (2014c, p.161) notes, ‘New Labour redesigned citizenship under the double axis of inclusion/exclusion and work/worklessness’. This analysis then served as a justification for measures to assist ‘the poor’ to become socially included via an emphasis on the welfare-to-work transition. In this effort, which has been continued by the coalition, ‘work’, narrowly understood as engagement in paid employment, is unproblematically valorised as the primary duty of the responsible citizen (Patrick, 2013b).

As with the focus on ‘work’ in governmental models of welfare contractualism, there are unanswered questions regarding how far a communitarian duty to engage in work is also felt by those with the wealth and resources to choose not to enter formal employment. Nonetheless, the equation of ‘work’ with duty and responsibility is a marked feature of the political approach taken by all governments since at least 1979, and is potentially exclusionary, given the consequences for all those who cannot or choose not to participate in formal employment. Commentators on the New Labour regime consistently observed the single-minded focus on paid work as

the primary social obligation which citizens should be expected to fulfil (cf. Dean, 1999; Lister, 2001b; Prideaux, 2010), an observation which can be validly extended to the coalition.

2.4.2 The valorisation of 'work'

Blair, Brown and, most recently, Cameron describe 'work' in the paid labour market as an unproblematic social good and endow it with transformative properties. Policy documents, political speeches and even tweets inform us of the benefits which come with work, which extend beyond monetary rewards to improved self-respect, dignity, self-esteem, health, well-being and better family life (cf. Duncan Smith, 2014c; DWP, 2006; DWP, 2010c; Ramesh, 2010). As Duncan Smith recently put it:

Work is about more than just money. It is about what shapes us, lifts our families, delivers security, and helps rebuild our communities (2014b, unpaginated).

'Work' is often conceptualised as the ultimate policy panacea – a silver bullet – that can not only end 'welfare dependency' but deliver people from substance addiction and help Britain's most troubled families back on their feet (HM Government, 2012). It is conceptualised as both the duty and the reward of the good and decent citizen. Cameron used a high profile speech on welfare reform to argue:

...we've got to recognise that in the end, the only thing that really beats poverty, long-term, is work. We cannot emphasise this enough. Compassion isn't measured in benefit cheques – it's in the chances you give people...the chances to get a job, to get on, to get that sense of achievement that only comes from doing a hard day's work for a proper day's pay (2012c, unpaginated).

The importance reserved for paid employment is conceptualised as largely non-problematic, given politicians' representation of 'work' as the activity most central to life and wellbeing (Newman 2011). This account neglects to consider how far these transformative rewards are also available to those working in menial, insecure and low paid jobs. This is despite government and academic research which highlights the role of the quality and nature of the work in determining whether individuals secure improvements to health and wellbeing when entering employment (Overell, 2011; Wadell and Burton, 2006). Put bluntly, a low-grade, temporary and stigmatised job may be detrimental to an individual's health and sense of well-being – a reality that starkly clashes with the government's work-first approach. Britain's changing labour market has an increasing preponderance of jobs that are insecure and temporary, as highlighted by the considerable growth in zero-hour contracts

(Groom, 2014; Oxfam, 2012). Recent figures show almost 700,000 people had a zero-hour contract for their main job in 2014 (Inman, 2015). Further, the enduring reality of in-work poverty represents a pertinent challenge to the 'work is the best form of welfare' soundbite (Crisp et al., 2009; Living Wage Commission, 2014; Smith, 2010).

2.4.3 Promises of inclusion; processes of exclusion

Importantly, the rhetoric on personal responsibility repeatedly equates the working citizen with the good, responsible citizen. In this dominant citizenship narrative, transitions from reliance on out-of-work benefits into paid employment are characterised as having the potential to secure individuals full citizenship status. As Duncan Smith argues:

Having a job is one of the best ways for individuals to find a foothold in society again – and stay there (2013, unpaginated).

With governments' policy focus over the past three decades centred on enabling and assisting people to make that transition (see chapter 3), welfare reform can be understood as a strategy for social inclusion, and a means of creating a nation of 'hardworking families' all fulfilling their citizenship responsibilities. New Labour equated social exclusion with a lack of employment, and thus also tied social inclusion to participation in paid employment (Levitas, 1998; Lister, 2001a). This policy analysis and linked emphasis on 'work' has been continued and arguably extended by the coalition (see Chapter 3). Policies designed to engineer social inclusion increasingly focus on efforts to assist and support people off welfare and into 'work', in the hope that these policies will deliver both higher rates of employment (and reductions to social security expenditure) as well as improved social inclusion for the targeted individuals (see Chapter 3). This is allied to a Social Integrationist Discourse which places onus on achieving social inclusion by helping people into paid employment, with the New Deal and Work Programme archetypal programmes in this regard (Levitas, 1998).

In this way, an emphasis on welfare-to-work, and reliance on welfare conditions and sanctions, are justified on the basis that they are required to assist people to become 'responsible', and included in the citizenry. This provides a possible logic for recent governments' approach, which is sanitised and explained through a rubric of social inclusion. For example, in defending plans to remove benefits for young people as part of attempts to ensure all are 'earning or learning', George Osborne presented the choice politicians faced:

We have a choice between paying our young people for a life on the dole, or giving them the keys to a life of opportunity. (2014, unpaginated)

Here, Osborne argues that reforms which retrench welfare provision, and extend welfare conditionality, are mechanisms for aiding the social inclusion of targeted individuals, with compulsion posited as having the potential to bring young people closer to the paid labour market and thus full citizenship.

The ways in which such an approach, and accompanying rhetoric, only serve to further exclude individuals from full citizenship are neglected from governments' accounts. By equating paid employment alone with dutiful citizenship behaviour, this framing inevitably excludes all those unable to participate in paid employment who are granted a lesser, devalued citizenship status (Levitas, 2001; Lister, 1999). This extends beyond those 'choosing' not to work to those unable to work whether due to disability, caring responsibilities or old age (Lister, 2003). The various other forms of socially valuable contribution in which so many out-of-work benefit claimants are engaged, such as volunteering, caring and parenting work, are neglected, given that they do not 'count' as practices deserving of full citizenship. While paid employment is consistently valorised, care work is devalued and all too often rendered invisible. For example, the suggestion that single parents must be subject to welfare-to-work carries with it the implicit message that parenting does not constitute work (Fraser and Gordon, 1994). The economic imperative of welfare-to-work seems to crowd out the ethic of care (Williams, 2012b), with paid employment given prominence over other forms of contribution which individuals may themselves want to prioritise.

Those subject to work-related conditionality are also subject to the suggestion that they are failing to fulfil their citizenship duties, with meeting welfare conditions characterised as not only helping such individuals escape 'welfare dependency' but also enabling them to secure a more certain citizenship status. Citizenship thus becomes a disciplinary tool to promote behavioural change and regulate individual behaviour, with social citizenship becoming 'increasingly conditional, exclusive and selective in recent years' (Lister, 2011a p.78). Although the government promises to protect those who 'really' cannot work, those receiving less conditional social welfare will nonetheless also experience a more precarious citizenship status, given that they are not performing the prescribed role of the dutiful worker-citizen. Those best buffered from the obligation to 'work' are rich non-workers, who seem to be given a tacit get-out clause by their supposed 'independence' from social welfare. It is possible that rich non-workers are included in the broader civic republican emphasis on the duty to work, but they certainly do not face the interventionist and sometimes punitive approach that is the lot of those reliant on out-of-work benefits.

Recent governments' reliance on crude and, arguably, unsustainable distinctions between 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants' (see Chapter 3) only serves to further the exclusionary potential of this citizenship narrative, with those classed as inactive 'dependents' stigmatised and stereotyped as non-contributing and irresponsible. In this way, a dominant narrative of citizenship inclusion via welfare-to-work arguably masks its more excluding and divisive effects, which are inevitable consequences of the single-minded focus on paid employment as the solitary hallmark of desirable, responsible behaviour.

For our purposes, what is particularly important is how far the articulation of a communitarian duty to work has become almost omnipresent in recent years. Although contractualism and communitarianism both stress the importance of personal responsibility, the former describes a reciprocal relationship, which demands obligations from the state as well as the individual citizen, whilst the latter is comfortable with asserting individual responsibilities which should be fulfilled regardless of any government action. Whilst the contractualist case is also in evidence in government pronouncements, it is possible that this is sometimes used as a political device to defend policies which actually rest on more communitarian sentiments. For reasons of political expediency, defending compulsion and conditionality with the promise of more support may be more popular than a pseudo-theological sermon on personal responsibility and duty, and this could explain the enduring reliance on contractualist arguments in dominant narratives defending welfare-to-work.

2.4.4 Broader civic republican and solidaristic sentiments

Beyond the rhetoric on the duty to 'work', recent governments have also displayed evidence of broader civic republican thinking and theorising on the potential constituent parts of a 'good' society. In contemporary political narratives, there is a repeated emphasis on the personal responsibilities of the good citizen, with pronouncements resonating with elements of classic civic republican thinking. Cameron repeatedly articulated the importance of responsibility: "...what holds society together is responsibility...the good society is a responsible society" (2009b, unpaginated).

Indeed, he chose his first Conservative party conference speech as Prime Minister to articulate his understanding of citizenship in apparently civic republican terms:

Citizenship isn't a transaction – in which you put your taxes in and get your services out. It's a relationship – you're part of something bigger than yourself, and it matters what you think and you feel and you do. So to get out of the

mess we're in, changing the government is not enough. We need to change the way we think about ourselves, and our role in society. Your country needs you (Cameron, 2010d, unpaginated).

This passage is notable for explicitly challenging a liberal contractual model of citizenship and calling, instead, for an approach to citizenship centred on solidarity and a sense of duty to one's country. The characterisation of the dutiful citizen, which appears from the coalition's rhetoric to date, places increased burdens and expectations on the individual. The promised 'opportunity' for more control over one's life (Conservatives, 2010a) can quite easily be recast into an obligation with a related duty to eschew reliance on the state wherever possible.

Interestingly, both New Labour and the coalition place onus on the community and the family as the units of social action and drivers for an improved social world (cf. Cameron, 2010b; Cameron, 2011b; Cameron, 2014a; Department for Communities and Local Government, 2008), suggesting that their 'good' society is grounded in fundamentally conservative understandings of responsibility and cohesion. This is particularly notable in coalition accounts. For example, in decrying the 'broken society' they claim to encounter, Cameron and Duncan Smith place emphasis on the decline in traditional family forms and marriage, with a related preoccupation with the continued rise of single parent families (Cameron, 2009a; Cameron, 2011b; Duncan Smith, 2010a). Family breakdown is described as one of the five pathways to poverty, with an ongoing emphasis on the importance of seeking to enable and assist the creation and sustaining of stable family units (Centre for Social Justice, 2009; Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education, 2011). The government recently announced the roll out of 'family impact assessments', promising that each new policy will be judged on the basis of whether it promotes and helps sustain the family (Cameron, 2014a). In a speech to announce these new assessments, David Cameron described the family as the primary driver of action to address societal problems, an emphasis that again places obligation on individuals rather than the state. Cameron explained:

Whether it's tackling crime and anti-social behaviour or debt and drug addiction; whether it's dealing with welfare dependency or improving education outcomes – whatever the social issue we want to grasp – the answer should always begin with family (2014a, unpaginated).

2.4.5 The 'Big Society'

Closely aligned to his emphasis on the importance of the family, Cameron for a time also sought to create a 'big society' (Cameron, 2010c); conceptualised as a

corrective to the 'big state' and a way of encouraging individuals to better support themselves, their families and their wider communities. While the 'big society' idea has gradually disappeared from view, it was prominent in the Conservatives 2010 General election manifesto:

Our alternative to big government is the 'big society', a society with much higher levels of personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility; a society where people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities; a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control (Conservatives, 2010a, p.37).

In developing the 'big society' thesis, Cameron drew upon a range of philosophical traditions and strands of Conservative thinking including the compassionate conservatism championed by Blond (2010), Norman (2010) and the Centre for Social Justice (2009), as well as the more libertarian and free-market orientated civic conservatism of David Willetts (2008). What all these analyses seem to share is a reinvigorated focus on personal responsibility, alongside a critique of a disempowering and dependency generating welfare state. In calling for individuals to become active members of the 'big society', there was a recourse to ideals of responsibility extending beyond personal responsibility towards a broader sense of social responsibility, where people work together for the common good (cf. Cameron, 2009a; Cameron, 2011a). This vision was characterised as a corrective to economic individualism and the mistaken assumption that a big state can create a 'good' society (Cameron, 2009a). In the Conservative analysis, big government is part of the problem, as it can operate to promote selfishness and individualism, with reform required around a remade society and a smaller state (Lister and Bennett, 2010).

This retreat from state intervention and deepening of personal responsibility exhibit elements of civic republican citizenship theorising, where the importance of our duty to one another as fellow humans is elevated beyond the rights and expectations we can make of the state through a social contract. Importantly, the 'big society' critique is also grounded in a broken society rhetoric, describing a status quo characterised by social recession, the decline in civic society, and the associated emergence of intergenerational 'welfare dependency' (Social Justice Policy Group, 2006). As Cameron puts it "...we do need a social recovery to mend the broken society. To me, that's what the big society is all about" (Cameron, 2011a, unpaginated). Inevitably, a broken society analysis can serve to devalue and undermine the citizenship status of those characterised as 'broken', while it is not clear how far the characterisation of a big state crowding out civil society actually fits with the lived

reality on the ground. Certainly, there are clear parallels between characterisations of a sub-stratum of irresponsible, non-working 'Broken Britons' and ideas of an underclass (Prideaux, 2010).

While the 'big society' thesis was held to have little traction and understanding with the electorate (Bochel, 2011; Osborne, 2011), and has gradually been dismantled as a concept driving coalition policy, Cameron's early adoption and emphasis on it is in itself telling. The notion of a 'big society' suggested a reformulated vision of personal responsibility, with a greater emphasis on the individual's role as an active creator of the 'good' society. Ideas of 'responsible' citizens busily engaged in the 'big society' brought with it the potential to further demarcate those perceived as responsible from the supposedly irresponsible, with these two groups likely to experience state intervention and 'encouragement' to become active citizens rather differently. Wealthier groups may be encouraged to participate via the odd 'nudge', but those lower down the income spectrum are more likely to experience state intervention as the repeated 'shove' and 'push' (Ellison, 2011).

2.5 Changing nature of social citizenship in the UK

2.5.1 The demise of social rights

Having explored the dominant citizenship narratives emanating from the New Labour and coalition governments, it is critical to summarise some commentators' conclusions on the consequences of these narratives for social citizenship in Britain today. These consequences sit alongside the ongoing impact of changes to the nature of social citizenship; with the social rights of citizenship becoming increasingly conditional over the past 35 years (see Chapter 3). There is broad consensus that social citizenship rights are today far more conditional than they were at the foundation of the welfare state (Clarke et al., 2014; Dean and Melrose, 1999; Dwyer, 2010; Flint, 2009; Lister, 2011a), with behavioural conditions typically orientated around the expectations that most working-age adults will be participating in the paid labour market, or taking steps to do so, wherever possible. As welfare conditionality increases, the social rights of citizenship change, becoming increasingly constrained and contingent on a citizen's compliance with state-defined expectations of what constitutes 'responsible' behaviour. Further, the emphasis on enforcing 'responsible' behaviour through welfare conditionality suggests that those citizens who are targeted by welfare conditionality are exhibiting irresponsible behaviours, requiring the threat of sanctions to become responsible, dutiful citizens (Lister, 2011a). In this way, processes of welfare conditionality, in close conjunction with an explicitly

moralising narrative, inevitably operate to stigmatise and exclude those enveloped within the conditionality regime, with a status of second class or lesser citizen attached to affected individuals (Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2004). Given that this policy process sits alongside, and is itself closely connected to a contractualist and communitarian narrative that places solitary emphasis on paid work as the marker of the dutiful citizen, those not in paid work, and subject to welfare conditionality, face multi-layered processes of exclusion.

2.5.2 Re-commodifying labour and citizenship as social control

In contrasting the contemporary citizenship framework with the intention of the post war welfare state, it is notable how far recent changes have involved a 'recommodification' of labour (Bode, 2008), such that most individuals now find their citizenship rights contingent on their willingness to take active steps to prepare for a return to paid employment. Governments continue to promise to support those who 'really' cannot 'work', but such individuals still find their citizenship status undermined by the focus on paid employment as the hallmark of 'responsible' behaviour. Lister has described the current period as the 'age of responsibility' (Lister, 2011a), with instilling responsibility in its citizens a central motif guiding the coalition's policy agendas and reform programmes. Increasingly, citizenship is reconceptualised as a project and process, requiring the state's involvement and (often punitive) interventions to assist individuals to become 'responsible' via 'processes of responsabilization' (Clarke, 2005). These processes see citizens required to comply with state-defined obligations at the same time as being repositioned as (at least partly) 'empowered citizens' who are expected to self-regulate and self-govern their behaviours (Clarke, 2005).

Reflecting on these changes, a number of commentators have concluded that citizenship now operates as a mechanism of social control, a subversion of its original emancipatory and inclusive intent (Clarke, 2005; Flint, 2009; Tyler, 2010; Tyler, 2014c). There have long been theorists who have described social welfare operating as a form of social control (Becker, 1997; Blakemore, 2003; Sinfield, 1978), but the extension of these ideas to social citizenship in particular is notable. Flint (2009) argues that the social rights of social citizenship have been re-worked so that they now operate to control deviant populations, while Lister emphasises how citizenship increasingly operates as a disciplinary tool designed to regulate and sometimes change personal behaviour(s) (Lister, 2011a). Similarly, Swyngedouw (2006) describes 'governance innovation' whereby purportedly democratic forms including citizenship are subverted so that they become instruments of government control. This ties in closely with Tyler's (2014c) work on 'social abjection', and her

observation that citizenship is operating as a regime of governance which serves to 'abjectify' and exclude specific groups and populations, including those living in poverty. All these writers observe how citizenship has been co-opted by governments as a framework which can be mobilised to justify and defend their programmes of policy reform, which are themselves conceptualised as having profoundly excluding and exclusive outcomes. These observations remind us of the essentially contested nature of citizenship, and the extent to which it is constantly being re-worked and re-imagined (Clarke et al., 2014; Hoffman, 2004).

2.5.3 What emancipatory potential remains?

Observing the current state of social citizenship in the UK, with social rights increasingly reconceptualised as conditional privileges (Lister, 2013), and citizenship duty mobilised around paid employment (Lister, 2013; Patrick, 2014b; Wright, 2015), it is sometimes difficult to see what, if any, egalitarian potential social citizenship still holds (Bode, 2008; Tyler, 2010). Clarke (2005) cautiously posited the 'abandonment of the citizen' under New Labour, an observation which could equally be made of more recent reforms under the coalition, while Standing has argued that those living in poverty are better thought of as 'denizens' rather than citizens (2014). With citizenship increasingly operating as a tool of government control, there are unanswered questions as to how and whether it can instead be mobilised in calls for greater equality and recognition for all.

In the following chapters, there is an exploration of the lives of individuals at the sharp end of the government's welfare reforms, with a focus on the citizenship implications of both policy changes and the dominant citizenship narrative. By examining 'citizenship from below' in this way, it is possible to better grasp the lived realities of citizenship, and begin to consider how best to conceptualise and better understand social citizenship in twenty first century Britain.

2.6 Conclusion

New Labour and the coalition draw upon both civic republican and liberal citizenship theories in defending their political priorities on welfare reform. A populist articulation of the liberal citizenship tradition is noted across both political regimes, with welfare contractualism repeatedly deployed to characterise the relationship between out-of-work benefit claimants and the state as one which features rights, but most importantly responsibilities, on the part of the claimant. Indeed, while governments, rhetorically at least, put onus on both sides of the equation, in practice the emphasis is very much on the responsibilities which individuals must first fulfil if they are to be

eligible for out-of-work benefits. Recent governments' valorisation of the duty to work is also tied to a communitarian and civic republican notion of citizenship which characterises citizenship as a practice, with the primary responsibility to participate in paid employment.

Arguably, at the political level, civic republican and liberal perspectives on citizenship are not mutually exclusive and, instead, can be blended together in ways that can be used to defend particular policy agendas. Certainly, New Labour and the coalition have employed both civic republican and liberal ideas of citizenship, often in tandem, to defend an increasing recourse to welfare conditionality, and the related tying of rights to responsibilities in both policy and rhetoric. Together, both contractualist and communitarian rhetoric operates to facilitate an exclusionary discourse of citizenship which operates along a work/non-work, inclusion/exclusion axis (Patrick, 2014a; Tyler, 2014c). This provides a framework from which government action to 'assist' people into work can be defended as part of a programme of social inclusion, whilst also acting as justification for action to cut back welfare entitlement in order to reduce 'passive' 'welfare dependency'.

Exploring the citizenship perspectives of New Labour and the coalition deepens our understanding of the ideologies behind the welfare reform agenda. It allows us to move beyond an analysis of individual policies and broader trends to consider the motivating forces which drive policy change(s). The equation of personal responsibility with paid employment and the characterisation of out-of-work benefit claimants as 'irresponsible' are key themes that have framed the qualitative research undertaken here (see Chapters 5-9). As this chapter has demonstrated, there is great potential in exploring governmental narratives on welfare reform through the lens of social citizenship, with citizenship theorising also having scope to inform empirical explorations of individual experiences of changing welfare entitlement. Thus, ideas of citizenship will suffuse subsequent analysis and should help to deepen our understanding of the impact and consequences of the welfare reform agenda.

Chapter 3 Welfare reform policy context: 1979 – 2015, towards ‘ubiquitous conditionality’

3.1 Introduction

Dominant citizenship narratives, and the rationalising behind them, are closely intertwined and bound up in a government’s social security policy responses and reform directions. As the UK’s welfare state has been reformed over the past 35 years, particular ideas of citizenship have provided a justification for policies that strip back the social rights of individual citizens, and instead place their primary focus on citizens’ responsibility to engage with paid employment (see Chapter 2). This chapter explores the changing shape of British social security policy, with an emphasis on the welfare-to-work project and its efforts to assist as many as possible to make the transition into paid employment. There is an inherent logic in focusing on welfare-to-work policy, given that it is here that there is particular evidence of efforts to rework and redefine the rights and responsibilities of citizens (Wright, 2009). Welfare-to-work policy is examined alongside broader welfare reforms, with a consideration of the ways in which these reforms have changed, and arguably undermined, the social rights of citizenship. While this chapter focuses on the UK, it should be noted that the overall reform direction and, in particular, the growing emphasis on welfare conditionality and activation are trends common across most OECD countries (Driver, 2011; Gilbert and Besharov, 2011).

Following some observations around the key shifts that have occurred in social security policy, and the salient features of the current approach, this chapter briefly charts key policy measures introduced by first the Thatcher and Major governments, and then New Labour. A more detailed outline of the coalition’s reforms is then provided, necessarily concentrated upon those reforms which directly affected the participants in this study. This outline also describes the conditionality framework in operation under the coalition, and reflects upon how this has been extended and intensified by each administration since 1979. In concluding, the extent of the shift in policy is considered, as is the degree to which a new welfare settlement now operates in the UK, with the major political parties in broad agreement over the policy tools and overarching direction of reform.

3.2 Towards an active society

The fundamental objectives of social security have been transformed since the foundation of the welfare state (Bradshaw, 2015). Originally orientated around

security and protection, and based upon a model of comprehensive and universal social welfare provision, today social security is seen as effective only if it is an active agent in encouraging and compelling people to make changes in their lives. Walters conceptualises this shift as a transition from a 'welfare society' to an 'active society' (1997), placing particular emphasis on a changing understanding of people's relationship with paid employment. He describes how under both the welfare society and the active society, people's relationships with paid employment are fundamental in determining their citizenship rights, and their status in society. However, while in the welfare society those non-workers who were elderly, disabled, or occupied caring for children were granted a status of social citizens and not expected to participate in paid employment, in the active society, all are expected to fulfil their potential to become workers (1997). While the welfare society was inevitably gendered, and excluded many from the right to employment, it did recognise forms of contribution other than paid employment and granted protection via the social rights of citizenship. By contrast, in the active society it is only through engagement in paid employment that people's contributions as citizens are fully recognised; a fundamental reworking of social citizenship. This is linked to the allied transition from a male breadwinner model of employment contribution to an adult worker model, where almost all working age adults, male and female, parents and non-parents, are expected to participate in paid employment (Wright, 2009).

The welfare – active society shift is a significant one (Dwyer, 2004a), and arguably effectively summarises the central change in policy ambition and focus over the past 70 years, while also capturing the importance now placed on the efforts individuals themselves need to take to become active as 'workers' and contributing citizens. The active society puts emphasis on a project of the self, requiring individuals to 'work on themselves' (Walters, 1997, p.221) to stay, or become, employable. In calling for reform, governments repeatedly critique the 'passive' nature of social security and the individuals who rely on it, with 'activation' of both conceptualised as the necessary policy solution (cf. Conservatives, 2010b; Department for Social Security, 1998). Most recently, Secretary of State for the Department for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith has spoken of how "those in the welfare system should be on a journey" (2012b, unpaginated), emphasising that "life change is the key to moving people out of poverty" (2012a, unpaginated). In a particularly telling quote, then Department for Work and Pensions minister Chris Grayling, described how his government "...want a welfare state which is a ladder up which people climb not a place in which they live" (DWP, 2011a).

In this policy framing, the supposed passivity of out-of-work claimants is highlighted, and there is a repeated emphasis on the need to encourage ‘responsible’ behaviour which is narrowly equated with engagement in paid employment. This policy narrative is best characterised as an ‘individualisation of the social’ (Ferge, 1997), with its suggestion that the base of the problem is one of individual character and often, perhaps, irresponsibility on the part of individual claimants (Newman, 2011). Individual agency is forefronted, with an enduring neglect of the structural factors that can make people’s engagement in paid employment problematic (Newman, 2011; Patrick, 2014a). The policy lens is firmly directed at the supply-side of the labour market, with comparatively little attention paid to demand-side issues, such as the nature of the paid labour market, access to child care and enduring issues of in-work poverty, insecure employment and exploitation in the labour market (Patrick, 2014a; Wright, 2009). Given the evidence of substantial and enduring demand-side barriers to paid employment for many (Crisp et al., 2009; Shildrick et al., 2012b) (see Chapter 6), this framing can be described as a classic case of ‘blaming the victim’ (Deacon, 1997), which then serves as policy justification for an emphasis on measures to enforce individual responsibility via ever more punitive forms of welfare conditionality.

3.3 Policy problem and solution: from ‘welfare’ to ‘work’

Today, ‘welfare’ is conceptualised as part of the problem, with politicians repeatedly describing how it has engendered ‘cultures’ of ‘welfare dependency’ and created ‘perverse incentives’ where it becomes financially viable to ‘choose’ benefits as a ‘lifestyle choice’ (cf. Duncan Smith, 2014a; Duncan Smith, 2014b). In his speech in the immediate aftermath of Britain’s 2011 riots, Cameron was unequivocal in his condemnation of our benefits system:

For years, we’ve had a [benefits] system that encourages the worst in people – that incites laziness, that excuses bad behaviour, that erodes self-discipline, that discourages hard work, above all that drains responsibility away from people... (Cameron, 2011b, unpaginated).

The notion of social security – re-branded as ‘welfare’ – as inherently negative and problematic now predominates and is arguably a notable feature of an emerging moral consensus across much of British society (see Chapters 8&10). In this imagining, measures to reduce ‘welfare’ and make it ever more conditional are conceptualised as necessary to mitigate its negative effects. Thatcher, Major, Blair, Brown and now Cameron have all critiqued the ‘problem’ of ‘welfare dependency’,

with each promising that theirs will be the government to finally end the ‘something for nothing’ culture (cf. Department for Social Security, 1998; Department of Health and Social Security, 1985; DWP, 2010c; Thatcher, 1988). In what Clarke and Newman (2012) describe as an ‘alchemy of austerity’, ‘welfare’ is increasingly characterised as the root of many of Britain’s problems, with austerity and cuts to support for the poorest in society posited as the only solution.

The corollary of the ‘problem’ of ‘welfare dependency’ is the solution of ‘work’; with paid employment conceptualised as transformative and the primary objective of effective welfare policy (Wright, 2009) (see Chapter 2). In the UK, a work-first approach is taken, with welfare-to-work policy firmly focused on assisting out-of-work claimants to make the transition into *any* paid employment (Wright, 2012). There is less emphasis on improving skills and employability than in other countries (what is referred to as a human capital approach), while there is also a neglect of the reality that not all forms of paid employment deliver the transformative rewards that the government promises (Patrick, 2013b; Wright, 2011a; Wright, 2012) (see Chapters 2&6).

While the first big tranche of welfare-to-work policy reforms (under Thatcher and Major) focused on ‘unemployed’ populations, there is now a broader emphasis on ‘economically inactive’ populations, which includes many single parents and disabled people (Deacon and Patrick, 2011). Politicians routinely speak of ‘worklessness’ rather than ‘unemployment’ (Wiggan, 2012), and are increasingly preoccupied with bringing the supposed rewards of paid employment to ever more of those currently reliant on out-of-work benefits. The drive to end ‘welfare dependency’ and assist as many as possible to make the transition from ‘welfare-to-work’ is justified on the basis that the transformative rewards of paid employment will be provided to greater proportions of the population (see Chapter 2).

3.4 ‘Ubiquitous conditionality’

In welfare-to-work policy interventions, there is a sustained emphasis on the policy tool of welfare conditionality (Dwyer and Wright, 2014). Welfare conditionality, which can be defined as ‘the obligations which claimants must fulfil in order to (continue to) receive benefits’ (Griggs and Bennett, 2009, p.2), has become widely accepted as a primary and necessary policy response in a diverse range of policy domains (Standing, 2011a; Watts et al., 2014). Characterised by many as a form of social control, conditionality is an inherently behaviouralist policy tool, centrally concerned with changing the behaviour of those that it targets (Deacon, 2002). Today,

conditionality is seen as an effective and, crucially, reasonable means of ensuring that citizens meet their responsibilities to the state, and is a policy articulation of the welfare contractualist - rights and responsibilities - narrative of citizenship that now predominates (see Chapter 2). Welfare conditionality enforces the contractualist relationship between the state and citizens, and is justified in terms of fairness as reciprocity, and the oft repeated 'something for something' mantra (Patrick, 2011b; White, 2004b).

There have always been conditions attached to benefit receipt (Griggs and Bennett, 2009; Hills, 2015b), but what is marked about the contemporary era is the extent to which conditionality now dominates in terms of both political rhetoric and in the policy responses proposed to deal with each new supposed 'policy problem'. As Paul Gregg noted in his review of personal conditionality for the New Labour government, "conditionality is fast becoming the central tenet of the benefits system" (2008, p.27). In the welfare-to-work domain, conditionality is centrally tied to efforts to ensure that those not in paid employment are taking steps to enter employment, which now includes increasingly arduous forms of job search and work-related activity. In tracking the policy evolution from Thatcher to Cameron below, what is notable is how far the operation of conditionality has been both extended to more of the population, and intensified, with ever harsher threats and sanctions for non-compliance with the conditionality regime (McKay and Rowlingson, 2011). Taken together, these trends have led Wright and Dwyer (2014) to describe a contemporary policy landscape framed by 'ubiquitous conditionality', given the dominance of conditionality on Britain's social policy landscape. Importantly, those affected by welfare conditionality and so characterised as 'irresponsible' are disproportionately likely to be amongst the poorest of society, with the remaining population, in particular, the 'hardworking majority' more likely only to be encouraged or invited to behave slightly differently via the odd nudge and promise of incentives (Ellison, 2011; Harrison and Sanders, 2014) (see Chapter 2).

3.5 Strivers and shirkers, deserving and undeserving populations

Alongside a sustained policy emphasis on welfare conditionality, the current policy agenda is notable in how far it is built upon, and defended with recourse to, simplistic dichotomous distinctions between a 'hardworking majority' and 'welfare dependants', between 'strivers' and 'shirkers' (Jensen, 2014; Patrick, 2014a). These contemporary re-workings of old divisions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' populations (Lister, 2015b; Warren, 2005) have been employed by politicians of all mainstream parties, and have grown in significance over the past 35 years. Today,

they do considerable rhetorical work in efforts to justify ever more punitive forms of welfare conditionality, and reforms that undermine the social security safety net. These dichotomous divisions, despite being shown to be simplistic and unsustainable when examined against empirical evidence and lived experiences (Hills, 2015b; Shildrick et al., 2012a; Shildrick et al., 2012b) (see Chapter 6), seem to be increasingly accepted and appropriated by wider society, with claimants themselves also sometimes internalising and making use of them (Clark, 2014; Pykett, 2014) (see Chapter 8). The divisions created – essentially between those engaged in paid employment and those on out-of-work benefits – are another aspect of the dominant citizenship narratives’ emphasis on paid employment as the hallmark of responsible behaviour (see Chapter 2). Distinctions between inclusion/exclusion and responsibility/irresponsibility are mapped onto a paid employment/non-employment axis, with censure and hostility reserved for those sitting on the ‘wrong side’ of these divides (Patrick, 2014a).

In recent years, we have arguably seen a ratcheting up of the negative rhetoric reserved for ‘irresponsible’ ‘welfare dependants’ who have been treated with what could be characterised as open hostility by government and much of the mainstream media (Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2014c). This has led some commentators to talk of a demonisation of out-of-work benefit claimants (Wright, 2011a), a demonisation which is arguably part of a moral project to judge all those whose behaviour is deemed to be wanting. Iain Duncan Smith repeatedly refers to claimants “languishing on welfare” (2014b; 2014c) while David Cameron has spoken of New Labour leaving “generations to rot on welfare” (2014b). As disabled people are increasingly brought within the welfare conditionality framework (see below), there are signs that many within the disabled population are also finding themselves judged as ‘shirkers’ and as members of the growing ranks of the ‘undeserving poor’ (Briant et al., 2013; Garthwaite, 2011). It is critical to consider the impact of these divisive narratives for those on out-of-work benefits, who may find their own identity challenged by the media and government onslaught. The government’s stigmatising has a moralising character, which may ironically serve to *de*-moralise those reliant on out-of-work benefits (Brown and Patrick, 2012). Claimants may internalise and respond to these negative depictions in ways that further exclude them and make their return into formal employment less likely (see Chapter 8).

At the same time as out-of-work claimants face ongoing critique and stigmatisation from politicians, a ‘hardworking majority’ are endlessly praised and valorised, with politicians from all parties vying to be seen to defend their interests. At the 2013 Conservative Party Conference, David Cameron spoke under a banner of ‘for

hardworking people' (2013, unpaginated), while Ed Miliband has described how, if elected, the Labour Party would 'stand up for the hard-working majority' (2012, unpaginated). Recent years have seen the emergence of new discursive categories such as Ed Miliband's 'squeezed middle' and Nick Clegg's 'alarm clock Britain' intended to celebrate and elevate the actions of workers who are unproblematically assumed to be fulfilling their duties as 'good' citizens (cf. BBC News, 2010; Smith, 2011). Most recently, the government has been promising to support the nation's 'strivers', implicitly contrasting their hardworking behaviour with that of the 'shirkers' who Osborne describes passively "sleeping off a life on benefits" (Osborne, 2012, unpaginated). These dichotomous divisions too often seem to suggest fixed groupings of hard workers and passive benefit claimants, ignoring that these groups are in fact fluid with frequent movements between work and benefits the norm for those stuck in a low-pay, no-pay cycle (Shildrick et al., 2012b) (see Chapter 6). What is important in this context is the way in which these divisive categories can be mobilised in efforts to justify policy measures which seek to 'activate' 'welfare dependants' (Pykett, 2014). This negative and divisive rhetoric undermines any scope to build a solidaristic citizenship premised upon the equality of citizens, and it arguably contributes towards a hardening of public attitudes towards out-of-work claimants. While the relationship between political pronouncements and public opinion is complex, some have argued that the lurch to the right in public opinion can and should be traced to changes in the ways in which the elite, and particularly politicians, have stigmatised out-of-work benefit claimants (Clark, 2014; Sage, 2012).

Taken together then, it is possible to sketch out the key dimensions of the current social security landscape; a shift towards an 'active society' and an emphasis on the problem of 'welfare dependency' and the posited solution of paid employment. Conditionality is conceptualised as *the* tool to address the policy problem, a problem which is given popular meaning through the reproduction of simplistic divisions between 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants'. Importantly, of course, the contemporary landscape also shows a marked reliance on the provision of welfare services by third and private sector agencies, while there is also a notable shift away from state provision towards support by charitable and community bodies (as evident in the recent growth of food banks) (Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Perry et al., 2014; Wright, 2011b). Having outlined these central dimensions and themes, it is now important to consider the changes to the policy landscape in more detail, by summarising the welfare-to-work and welfare reform programmes of the 1979-2010 governments, before looking at the coalition in more detail.

3.6 1979–1997: The Thatcher and Major Years

During 18 years of Conservative government, the social security offer to unemployed people changed. Partly in response to rising unemployment in the early 1980s (Dolowitz, 1997), but also for ideological reasons linked to a sustained attack on ‘welfare dependency’, entitlement to unemployment benefits became increasingly conditional on efforts to find work (Page, 2010). Those most affected by the changes introduced were young people and the adult unemployed, who both found their social rights to benefits diluted. The introduction of Restart interviews in 1986 symbolised the start of a formalised conditional welfare regime in Britain, and a critical first step along the path towards activation (Jones, 2012). All those who had been unemployed for a year, soon revised to six months, were required to attend a Restart interview, with sanctions for non-attendance (Digby, 1989). Changes made in the 1989 Social Security Act introduced the ‘actively seeking work’ test to unemployment benefit receipt (Timmins, 2001), described by Deacon (1991) as effectively re-introducing the punitive ‘genuinely seeking work’ test of the 1920s. Benefit disallowances were threatened to those whose level of activity in seeking work was deemed inadequate, creating a clear link between benefit entitlement and demonstrable efforts to find work (Dolowitz, 1997; King and Ward, 1992; Price, 2000). Further, regulations governing the requirement to accept ‘suitable employment’ were altered to read ‘employment’; meaning that unemployed people were expected to accept any job offer, regardless of its pay, conditions and suitability, after only 13 weeks on benefit (Dolowitz, 1997).

This extension of conditionality was continued by the Major government, which replaced unemployment benefit with the stricter Job Seeker’s Allowance (JSA), and piloted Project Work, a compulsory 26 week programme which combined assisted job search and work experience for those out of work for two years or more (Scott and Brien, 2007). JSA claimants had to demonstrate that they were actively seeking work as a condition of benefit receipt, and were required to sign a Jobseeker’s Agreement, in which they outlined the steps they would take in their effort to secure employment (Dwyer & Ellison, 2009; Peck, 2001). The JSA regime remains in place today, and the central features of Project Work were reproduced in the New Deals (Tonge, 1999).

Young people were affected by the 1983 introduction of the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), which provided training and work-experience for those aged 16 and 17 not in employment or education, with a training allowance payable to those participating in the scheme (Riddell, 1989). Changes to the benefit rules in 1988 meant that those

who refused an offer of a YTS place would not receive any benefits, except in exceptional circumstances, a reform which effectively ended benefit entitlement for this age group (Digby, 1989; Johnson, 1990). These reforms had the effect of compelling those young people who wanted support from the state to participate in YTS, which was often criticised as involving menial work for private employers (Loney, 1986), and even derided as 'slave labour' (Walford, 1988). Interestingly, there have been similar criticisms made of New Labour's New Deals and the coalition's various programmes of mandatory work placements and experience (Daguerre and Etherington, 2014; Prideaux, 2001). Overall, the Conservative years saw the extension of conditionality operable on young people and the unemployed, and a sustained rhetorical attack on the dependency culture. Policies introduced, such as YTS and JSA, signalled a growing utilisation of work-related welfare conditionality – a trend which continued and extended under New Labour.

3.7 1997–2010: Enter New Labour

In opposition in the 1980s, Labour had vehemently opposed the Conservative reforms, with the Labour Party National Executive signing a Charter against Workfare, stating that all initiatives to encourage people back to work should be voluntary, and deriding compulsion as a 'recipe for lower standards, resentment and discrimination' (1998, cited in King and Wickham-Jones, 1999, p.257). Less than ten years later, in a radical break with this past, and one which represented a pivotal feature of their third way approach, New Labour announced plans for a programme of New Deals, to ensure that benefit entitlement was made conditional on efforts to find and secure work (Driver, 2004; King, 2005; Timmins, 2001). As Gordon Brown later put it, under the New Deal programmes 'when they [claimants] sign on for benefit, they will be signing up for work' (1997, cited in Timmins, 2001). Over three governments, New Labour extended and consolidated a conditional and supply-side focused approach to welfare-to-work, with a recurring stress on matching rights and responsibilities, activating the economically inactive and building a robust regime of sanctions and incentives to encourage and compel people to enter the formal labour market.

Central to New Labour's approach were the totemic New Deals, which provided training and work experience for those outside the labour market (Oppenheim, 1999). First to be launched was the compulsory New Deal for Young People (NDYP), targeted at young people aged between 18 and 25 who had claimed JSA for six months or more. Claimants could choose to participate in training, subsidised employment, voluntary work or placement on an environmental taskforce (DWP,

2008b). Those who refused to engage faced benefit sanctions, and potentially their complete withdrawal (King and Wickham-Jones, 1999). Also introduced was the compulsory New Deal for Long-term Unemployed, as well as voluntary new deals for single parents, disabled people, those aged over fifty and partners of the unemployed (Brewer and Joyce, 2010; DWP, 2008b). Towards the end of their time in office, acting on the recommendations of Freud (2007), New Labour started to roll the various new deals into one Flexible New Deal, designed to provide personalised support, whilst also extending conditionality with a tougher regime of sanctions for non-compliance (Morgan, 2009). The New Deals showed some continuity with Major's Project Work, whilst the NDYP embraced the YTS approach, but extended it up the age range, so that all unemployed young people up to 25 faced mandatory welfare-to-work measures.

Critically, New Labour went beyond the Conservatives in drawing single parents and disabled people into welfare-to-work, groups who had not traditionally been expected to participate in paid work as a condition of benefit receipt (Bryson, 2001; Dwyer, 2008; Jones, 2012). By first introducing voluntary measures to support single parents and disabled people back to work, which were then superseded by escalating conditionality, New Labour transformed the benefits regime for these groups. Of critical import was the 2008 introduction of a new benefit for disabled people, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA), claimants are placed in one of three groups depending on their judged capability to participate in paid employment (DWP, 2012a). Those with the most severe impairments are placed in the Support Group (SG), where they receive ESA without any conditions. Those judged to have some limited capability to work are placed in the Work-related Activity Group (WRAG) where they receive a slightly lower level of ESA and are expected to participate in work-related activity or risk benefit sanctions. A third group consists of those judged Fit for Work (FFW) who are refused ESA and invited instead to apply for JSA, for which they will need to comply with the significantly more stringent conditionality regime (2012a).

From its introduction, there have been considerable concerns around ESA, and particularly over whether the WCA was incorrectly finding people FFW, or placing those with very serious impairments in the WRAG where they are made subject to work-related conditionality (Grover and Piggott, 2012; Harrington, 2010; Spartacus Network, 2014; Warren et al., 2014). Appeal rates for ESA have been incredibly high, with a large proportion of appeals found in the claimant's favour (DWP, 2014a). Importantly, though, ESA has been left in place by the coalition, who have kept to

New Labour's timeline for the migration of existing Incapacity Benefit claimants onto the new benefit (see below).

Voluntary New Deals for disabled people and single parents were followed by mandatory work-focused interviews, and the migration of single parents with older children onto JSA (DWP, 2008b; Puttick, 2007), the start of what is now known as Lone Parent Obligations (Haux and Whitworth, 2014; Watts et al., 2014). From 2008, single parents whose youngest child was aged 12 or over were no longer eligible for Income Support (IS) on the basis of their parenting obligations alone, and instead were expected to move onto JSA where they would have to comply with significantly more work-related demands, albeit slightly moderated to take their parenting responsibilities into account (Lane et al., 2011). New Labour had planned to extend this to single parents whose youngest child was aged seven or over by Autumn 2010, but lost power before this could be implemented (2011).

Whilst overseeing a radical extension of work-related conditionality, New Labour also sought to make work pay, and to provide support to reduce the barriers for people seeking to enter, or return to, paid work (Driver, 2009; Ellison, 2006; Page, 2001; Walker and Wiseman, 2003). Policies contributing towards this objective included the introduction of a National Minimum Wage (NMW), tax credits to improve the financial rewards of paid work, extended childcare provision, and, for disabled people, anti-discrimination legislation and some financial support for workplace adjustments (Department for Social Security, 1998; Millar, 2006; Oppenheim, 1999; Puttick, 2007). Efforts around making work pay have included some of the most progressive and socially democratic policies of the New Labour administrations, with tax credits and the minimum wage particularly noteworthy in this respect (Deacon and Patrick, 2011). As illustrated above, however, New Labour presided over a considerable extension of work-related conditionality, with the particularly significant extension of its application to many disabled people and single parents.

3.8 2010 – 2015: A new politics? The coalition

The coalition promised a new way of doing things, vowing to tear up New Labour's supposedly failed attempts to tackle worklessness (Duncan Smith, 2010b). In fact, there has been marked continuity with their New Labour predecessors, particularly around a sustained emphasis on welfare-to-work and welfare conditionality. At the same time, however, the policy direction has been extended and accelerated, in what Lister and Bennett (2010) describe as a process of 'policy leapfrog'. There have also been some signs of a new approach, particularly around the introduction

of Universal Credit and the degree and extent of welfare retrenchment. This section first provides an overview of the changes made to the conditionality regime by the coalition, before exploring the 'support' provided to assist people to move back into employment and the efforts taken to ensure that work always pays more than benefits. This section includes a relatively detailed outline of those policy measures that directly affected the participants in this study, including the ESA reforms and changes to Lone Parent Obligations (LPOs).

3.8.1 Extending welfare conditionality

The coalition agreement contained an early commitment to conditionality (HM Government, 2010), and the government was quick to implement both an extension and intensification of conditionality. With regards to the extension of welfare conditionality, the coalition continued with New Labour's programme of ESA, and, in particular, oversaw the migration of existing IB claimants onto ESA. Despite inheriting significant concerns regarding the operation of ESA, and in particular the accuracy of WCAs, the coalition decided to press on with the timetabled migration, and actually sought to speed up the process (Grover and Piggott, 2012; Patrick, 2012a). While the coalition tried to allay fears about the operation of the WCA, and made some changes to the assessment process, significant concerns remain (Warren et al., 2014). In 2014 the firm previously contracted to carry out the assessments, ATOS, chose to resign their contract following a seemingly endless spate of negative publicity. A new firm, Maximus, is due to take over the assessments from 2015 (DWP, 2014c).

The latest figures for new claims for ESA started between January 2014 and March 2014 show that only 20% of claimants have an outcome as of September 2014, with 41% of claimants having their claim closed before having a WCA and 40% still undergoing assessment (DWP, 2014b, p.1). Of the 20% of claimants for whom a decision had been made on their claim, 76% were entitled to the benefit (62% placed in the SG and 14% in the WRAG), while the remaining 24% were found FFW and no longer eligible for ESA (2014b, p.3). These figures show a marked increase in the proportion of claimants awarded ESA, and particularly the number placed in the SG, particularly when contrasted with the figures for the migration of IB claimants onto ESA. It is worrying that a large proportion of claims (40%) were still being processed, given the uncertainty and worry these long processes can cause claimants (see Chapter 7). There is also a shortage of information regarding what happens to the 41% whose claims are closed before having a WCA, with the possibility that some are dropping out of the benefits system altogether. 47% of initial FFW decisions appealed against between July and September 2013 were

overturned after challenge (2014b, p.6), a stubbornly high rate of successful appeal. The government has now legislated for mandatory reconsideration of ESA decisions, meaning that claimants must first put in a request for mandatory reconsideration before they are allowed to lodge an appeal (DWP, 2013). This extra hurdle, especially when considered in conjunction with the removal of Legal Aid for help with benefit cases (Shackle, 2014), could make it harder for people to challenge benefit decisions, and therefore leaves greater scope for incorrect decisions to remain in place.

The coalition also extended the application of conditionality to single parents, with reforms to Lone Parents Obligations (LPOs). These have seen single parents migrated off Income Support (IS) and onto JSA when their youngest child reaches a certain age (introduced by New Labour, see above). In the 2010 Emergency Budget the coalition announced a further decrease in the age of a single parent's youngest child at which they would lose entitlement for IS from seven to five. This was legislated for in the 2012 Welfare Reform Act, and implemented immediately (Haux and Whitworth, 2014).

While the extensions of conditionality to ever more disabled people and single parents can be broadly conceptualised as a continuity of the New Labour approach, the coalition has also legislated for the introduction of in-work conditionality, representing a new direction for welfare conditionality (Bennett, 2012; Watts et al., 2014). Under Universal Credit, the majority of working claimants will be expected to be in full-time employment (a threshold equivalent to a thirty five hour week at the National Minimum Wage) (DWP, 2012c). Where claimants are not meeting this threshold, they will be expected to take steps to secure more employment or risk benefit sanctions. This is an important extension of conditionality, and one which might also serve to blur the divisions between 'strivers' and 'shirkers', given that those already in work will become subject to work-related conditionality. Finally, the government has also introduced what it calls 'Day One conditionality' under which pre-claim requirements are made before a JSA application will be accepted (DWP, 2014f; Watts et al., 2014). For in-person claims, there is now a requirement to show evidence of a CV and an email address, and to have signed up for the government's online job search programme 'Universal Jobs Match' before a claim will be processed. These requirements can be demanding for those with limited IT skills and other barriers to employment, and there are therefore concerns that they will prevent some from accessing benefits at all.

3.8.2 Intensifying conditionality

As well as extending conditionality, the coalition has overseen a marked intensification in its operation, which has included a considerable increase in both the severity and regularity with which sanctions are applied. The 2012 Welfare Reform Act introduced harsher sanctions, including the ultimate sanction of three years without benefits for those who three times fail to meet what are judged to be the most important demands made of them (DWP, 2012c). This Act also changed the ways in which sanctions are applied to disabled people; previously only threatened with a removal of a portion of their ESA, those in the WRAG now face the complete withdrawal of their benefit if they fail to comply with various work-related demands. In the charts below, the conditionality and sanctions regime as it now operates is outlined, showing how different conditionality ‘groups’ face different conditions and the various possible sanctions for non-compliance.


Figure 3 Conditionality levels within the current system		
	Conditionality level	Benefit claimed
	Active job search: Required to actively seek and be available for work	Jobseeker’s Allowance, including joint claims when youngest child has reached age of five
	Work preparation: Required to take steps to prepare for work	ESA recipients in WRAG group
	Keeping in touch: Required to attend Work Focused Interviews	Lone parents with child aged over one but under five claiming IS or ESA; partners of benefit recipients
	No conditionality	ESA recipients in SG, lone parents with child under one claiming IS or ESA

Figure 4 Sanctions regime				
Conditionality	Failure	Sanction		
Low JSA and ESA WRAG	Includes failure to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend appointment • Carry out jobseeker direction • Attend employment-related programme • Attend work-focused interview (ESA) • Carry out work-related activity (ESA) 	100% of JSA/ESA open ended until re-engagement then fixed minimum period (1, 2, then 4 weeks)		
Medium JSA only	Failure to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively seek work • Be available for work 	1 st failure: 100% JSA fixed for 4 weeks	2 nd failure: 100% JSA fixed for 3 months	
High JSA only	Failure to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply for a job • Accept job offer • Take part in Mandatory Work Activity 	1 st failure: 100% JSA fixed for 3 months	2 nd failure: 100% JSA fixed for 6 months	3 rd failure: 100% JSA fixed for 3 years

Both adapted from Department for Work and Pensions (2010c)

Since the coalition has been in power, there has been a marked rise in the imposition of sanctions, with 898,390 JSA and ESA sanctions imposed in the year to December 2013, more than double comparable figures for the last years of the New Labour governments (Webster, 2014b, p.5). A particularly marked increase in the number of ESA sanctions has been noted, with 3,837 and 4,789 ESA sanctions applied in the months of November and December 2013 respectively, the highest monthly figures since ESA sanctions were introduced in October 2008 (2014b, p.2). There is also evidence that the 'ultimate' three year sanction is being applied, with 1,229 claimants facing this sanction in the year to December 2013. Over half of those facing a three year sanction are aged 18-24 (628), whilst 219 (almost a fifth) are disabled and 37 are single parents, whose youngest child(ren) could be as young as five (2014b, p.3). These increases in the imposition of sanctions have led some to speak of a change in culture at Job Centres, and there has been some

evidence of Job Centres setting staff targets for minimum numbers of claimants to be sanctioned (BBC Radio 4, 2015; Domokos, 2011a; Domokos, 2011b).

There is growing concern about the operation and imposition of benefit sanctions, with issues around both the sanctions process and its impact on individual lives. With regard to the former, there is particular concern around the transparency and 'fairness' of the process, as well as a reported absence of clear information and effective communication about the sanction decision making process and rights to appeals and hardship (Oakley, 2014; Scottish Government, 2014). Critics have highlighted the 'frail grounds' for some sanction decisions, with evidence that sanctions are sometimes being applied due to misunderstandings rather than a claimant's deliberate failure to comply with a work-search direction (Ahrends, 2015; Channel 4, 2015b; Church Action on Poverty et al., 2015). There is mounting evidence of the very real hardship that sanctions can cause (Church Action on Poverty et al., 2015; Manchester CAB, 2013; Scottish Government, 2014; Stephenson, 2014), hardship that some commentators in the media have tied to cases of benefit claimants' suicide (Gentleman, 2014; Ryan, 2014). There is also evidence that some of those sanctioned may be exiting the benefits system altogether, where they may make costly demands on other areas of the welfare state, notably emergency housing provision, the health service and the criminal justice system (Loopstra et al., 2015). An independent review into JSA Sanctions, commissioned by the government, reported a range of procedural issues particularly around communication of sanction decisions and a lack of transparency in the decision making process, while defending the central importance of sanctions for a well-functioning benefits system (Oakley, 2014). Most recently, the Department for Work and Pensions Select Committee has commenced a wider-ranging review into the operation of the sanctions regime (Wintour, 2014a).

As well as overseeing a marked rise in the imposition of benefit sanctions, the coalition has increased the work-related demands made, particularly of jobseekers, who are now expected to treat looking for work as equivalent to a full-time job (Watts et al., 2014). Indeed, some of the longest term unemployed are now being mandated to attend a job centre 35 hours a week as a condition of their ongoing benefit receipt (Eaton, 2014). There is also an expectation that people will accept jobs up to a 90 minute journey from their home, with many obligated to participate in the Work Programme (discussed below) and various forms of work placement and experience. Mandatory work experience programmes such as Mandatory Work Activity, Sector Based Work Academies and the most recent, Help to Work Scheme, all require affected claimants to participate in compulsory, unpaid work experience

(Daguerre and Etherington, 2014; Eaton, 2014). These have been dogged with criticism and legal challenges, some successful (Daguerre and Etherington, 2014; Harris, 2011; Harris, 2012), but the coalition has remained committed to including them within their welfare-to-work policy offer. It should be noted that whilst these are sometimes proclaimed as evidence of a newer, more punitive approach under the coalition, New Labour was planning to pilot its own form of 'workfare', 'Work for Your Benefits' just as it left office (Smith, 2009).

The coalition has also introduced a 'Claimant Commitment', which codifies and makes explicit the coalition's expectations of all working-age benefit claimants (DWP, 2012b) (see Chapter 2). The 'Claimant Commitment' is a notable mainstreaming of the expectation that all claimants who receive out-of-work benefits (as well as many receiving in-work support) must enter into a written contractual agreement with the government.

3.8.3 More support? The Work Programme

Turning from conditions demanded, to support promised, the flip side of the hypothesised welfare contract, the government has repeatedly pledged more support to ensure that those out-of-work receive all the help they need to make the transition into paid employment (cf. Duncan Smith, 2010a; DWP, 2010c). One of the coalition's first policies was to establish the Work Programme (WP), a single programme of back-to-work support, which it promised would deliver innovative, personalised help to hundreds of thousands of out-of-work claimants (DWP, 2010a). JSA claimants and those in the WRAG of ESA are placed on the WP after a certain period on out-of-work benefits, determined according to age, perceived barriers to employment and particular issues such as a history of offending. Showing marked similarities with the Flexible New Deal which New Labour was just about to roll out as it left office (Deacon and Patrick, 2011), the WP is delivered by third and private sector companies on the basis of payment by results. It relies on a 'black box' contracting model, with no requirements for the nature and type of support offered, so long as results are delivered in moving people into sustainable employment (DWP, 2011c). Significant payments are available for positive outcomes, with a maximum fee of £14,000 for helping someone previously on IB into work which they sustain for two years (Wintour, 2011).

After a very poor start, the WP's performance against employment outcomes is improving, although there remains concern whether the promised innovative and personalised forms of support are actually being provided (Lancashire, 2010; Lane et al., 2013; Lawton et al., 2014; National Audit Office, 2012; Whitworth, 2013). There

are also concerns around creaming and parking, processes whereby WP providers choose who to target with help and support on the basis of those most likely to make a successful transition into paid employment, and so accrue them 'job outcome' payments. This is closely linked to the fear that those with the most complex barriers to employment are not receiving the support that they need (BBC Radio 4, 2012b). Figures for job outcomes for disabled participants in the WP are particularly low, with only 5% of those in the WRAG moving into paid employment from the scheme between 2011 and 2014 (Hale, 2014, p.5). It is notable that, to date, the WP has delivered more sanctions than job outcomes. Up to 30th June 2014, 545,873 JSA WP sanctions had been issued as compared to only 312,780 WP job outcomes (Webster, 2014a, p.8).

3.8.4 Making work pay – wholesale reform and retrenchment

The government has also pledged to make sure that work always pays, and has frequently spoken of issues around perverse incentives, whereby claimants can see little (or no) financial incentive to making the welfare-to-work transition (cf. Cameron, 2011b; Duncan Smith, 2010c). To address this, it has started to introduce Universal Credit (UC). This represents a radical proposed simplification to the benefits system, rolling up several benefits (including out-of-work benefits and tax credits) into one payment, which will be steadily withdrawn at a single taper rate as claimants enter work (Bennett, 2012). UC will be managed entirely online, and paid monthly in an effort to encourage claimants to get into good working habits (Bennett, 2012). It is an ambitious reform programme, and has so far been subject to significant delays in its implementation. By November 2014, only 18,000 households were claiming UC, less than half of one per cent of the people receiving the benefits and tax credits that it is intended to replace, and significantly less than the original target of 1 million live claims by 2014 (DWP, 2011b; Millar, 2015, unpaginated). It is too early to say whether the UC programme is permanently derailed, or simply taking far longer to implement given the complex and demanding nature of the reforms it entails. Early phases of its implementation have certainly been beset with difficulties, and there is particular problems being caused by delays in first payments and the shift in paying rent direct to tenants rather than their housing provider (Channel 4, 2015a; Gentleman, 2015). While a full critical analysis of the policy cannot be provided here, it is worth noting that many question whether it will necessarily improve work incentives in the way the government hopes (Brewer et al., 2011). There are also significant concerns about the gender implications of paying it into a single account only (in a household claim), with monthly payments also predicted to make the budgeting work of Britain's poorest households much more demanding (Bennett,

2012; Millar, 2015; Tarr and Finn, 2012) (see Chapter 7). The Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has warned that it will, in fact, reduce work incentives for second earners, with gendered implications, and has also suggested that single parents will be financially worse off as a result of its introduction (Brewer et al., 2011).

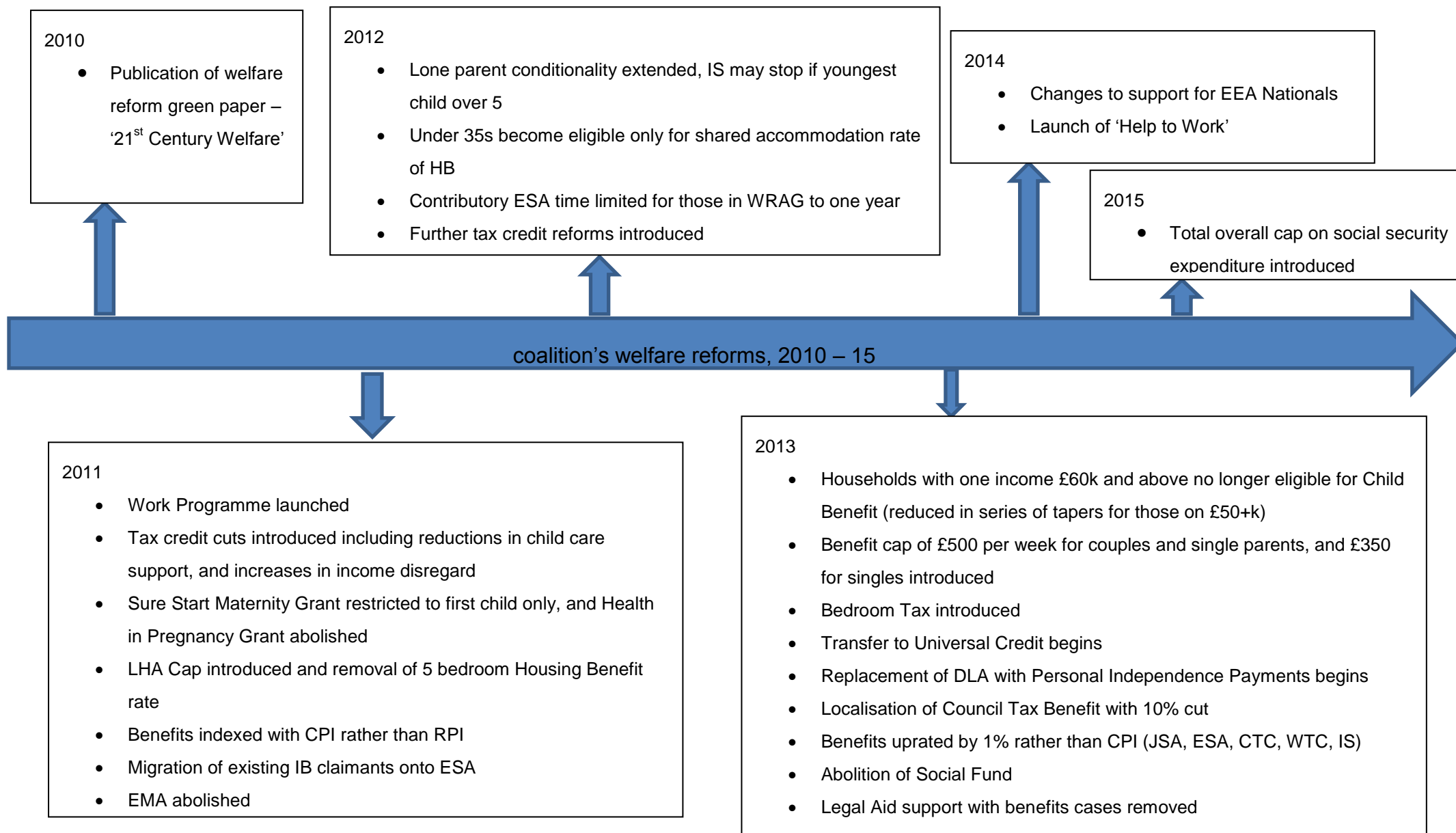
Aside from Universal Credit, the coalition has also embarked on a wholesale programme of welfare state retrenchment, which has seen social security increasingly residualised. The scale of the overarching cuts sought is itself impressive. The IFS estimates that, by the end of the 2010-15 parliament, reforms introduced by the government will have reduced expenditure on working-age social security spending by around £20bn a year, when compared to estimated expenditure on an unreformed system (Hood and Oakley, 2014, p.3). Given that total expenditure on working-age social security is generally in the region of £94bn, this reduction (more than 20% of total expenditure) represents a significant change. It is important to remember that the coalition inherited a particular social and economic context, with the 'budget deficit' dominating the political agenda. There is, of course, no way of knowing how far or whether Labour would have chosen to reduce social security expenditure had they been elected in 2010.

In seeking to justify their programme of cuts, the coalition has repeatedly put emphasis on a narrative of 'making work pay', a narrative that also predominated in the New Labour years. Critically, though, there are two ways to ensure that work pays more than 'welfare' (Stanley, 2010). Either the rewards of work can be increased (as New Labour did during its time in government), or those of 'welfare' can be reduced; in both cases, the gap between 'work' and 'welfare' increases. Arguably, the coalition has opted for the latter approach, and in so doing has shown a significant divergence from its New Labour predecessors. A list of the key cuts and reforms is provided in the timeline set out below. These reforms include the time-limiting of contributory ESA to one year, caps to the total a household can receive in benefits, the abolition of the Social Fund and withdrawal of Legal Aid for help with most benefit cases (DWP, 2010c). Successive changes to the rules for uprating benefits have seen the real value of benefits fall considerably, while the localisation of Council Tax Benefit (at the same time as reducing funding for it by 10%) leaves many of the poorest households facing a Council Tax Bill for the first time. The coalition have also extended the waiting days before a JSA claim can be made from three days to seven, with Osborne (2013a, unpaginated) arguing that "those first few days should be spent looking for work, not looking to sign on". This rhetoric again shows recourse to ideas of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice', with a neglect of the lived realities of out-of-work benefit receipt and low-paid work.

Ironically, increasing the waiting days before a claim can be made may actually undermine incentives to work, particularly for those contending with the low-pay, no-pay cycle who will have to weigh up accepting a job against the delay in signing on again if/when the role ends. This is only partially resolved by the linking rule, whereby a claimant faces no waiting days if they had a JSA or ESA award within the previous 13 weeks (DWP, 2014e).

Taken together, these reforms can be conceptualised as a determined assault on the social rights of citizenship, and one which has significantly weakened what little remains of a social security safety net (Bradshaw, 2015) (see Chapter 10). In contrasting the coalition's approach with its recent predecessors in government, two things are immediately notable. Firstly, the overarching trends on conditionality and welfare-to-work represent marked continuity with a direction of reform which has been in place since the Thatcher years. Secondly, though, there is little doubt that the past five years have seen the policy focus and accompanying rhetoric become increasingly punitive, so that sanctions are much more readily applied, and the whole social security edifice is undermined and threatened given the degree and extent of the cuts (Wright, 2012).

Figure 5 The coalition's key welfare reforms



3.8.5 The impact of the coalition's reforms

While there is not scope here to fully summarise the growing body of literature exploring the impact of the coalition's welfare reforms, it is important to emphasise some of the headline findings. These include considerable evidence that, despite Osborne's promise that "those with the broadest shoulders [will] bear the largest burden" (2013a, unpaginated), the cuts are disproportionately affecting those at the bottom of the income spectrum, with the cost of austerity regressively borne (Hills, 2015a; Lupton et al., 2015). Research by the IFS into the coalition's various Budgets and Autumn Statements has repeatedly found them to be regressive, with only the top income decile being progressively targeted (Browne, 2013; Browne and Elming, 2015; Emmerson, 2010; Phillips, 2014). The IFS recently conducted a cumulative assessment of the coalition's tax changes and benefit reforms, concluding:

low-income working-age households have lost the most as a percentage of their income from tax and benefit changes introduced by the coalition, mainly as a result of benefit cuts (Browne and Elming, 2015, p.2).

Analyses by IFS and Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) have estimated considerable increases in child poverty as a result of welfare reforms, with CPAG suggesting that 600,000 more children will have moved into absolute poverty between 2010 and 2015 (CPAG, 2013, unpaginated).

The table below, based on research by Beatty and Forthergill (2013), outlines the overall impact of some key welfare reforms, and reminds us that many millions of those in work have also been affected by changes to tax credits and Child Benefit. It also highlights the particularly significant financial loss faced by those affected by the Benefits Cap and the Incapacity Benefit Reforms, with an average annual financial loss per household of £3,460 and £4,820 respectively. It is critical to remember that households are often affected by several reforms at the same time, making the overall impact much greater (Social Security Advisory Committee, 2014).

Table 1 Overall impact of welfare reforms by 2014/15 (adapted from Beatty & Fothergill, 2013)

Welfare reform	No of households/individuals affected	Average loss per affected household/individual £ p.a.
Incapacity Benefits(1)	1,250,000	3,480
Tax Credits	4,500,000	810
Child Benefit	7,600,000	370
Housing Benefit: Local Housing Allowance	1,350,000	1,220
Disability Living Allowance (1) (2)	500,000	3,000
'Bedroom Tax'	660,000	740
Council Tax Benefit	2,450,000	140
Household benefit cap	56,000	4,820
(1) Individuals affected; all other data refers to households (2) By 2017/18		

There is also evidence that welfare reforms are disproportionately affecting women and disabled people, a challenge to Cameron's 'all in this together' mantra (O'Hara, 2014; Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011; Women's Budget Group, 2010; Women's Budget Group, 2014; Wood, 2012). Disabled people's greater reliance on social welfare makes them particularly vulnerable to cuts in provision, while they are also adversely affected by reductions in local authorities' spending, which have led to the rationing and reductions of many forms of social care and support (Scope, 2010; Wood, 2012). The Women's Budget Group (2014, p.2), drawing on figures from the House of Commons library, argue that 80% of the revenue raised and expenditure saved through changes to social security and personal taxes will come from women, demonstrating the extent of the disproportionate impact they face.

Commentators have described how an 'imperfect storm' of reductions in benefits and cuts to services against a context of a rising cost of living has caused real hardship and difficulties for many (Aylott et al., 2012; New Economics Foundation, 2012) (see Chapter 7). A notable feature of the contemporary landscape has been the huge

growth in the demand for food banks (Perry et al., 2014), which are perhaps symbolic of the unravelling of the state's provision (Bradshaw, 2015). An All Party Inquiry into food poverty described how 'hunger stalks' the UK (Field et al., 2014), and called for urgent action to address the growing issue of people simply being unable to afford to feed themselves and their families. The figures here are compelling. 913,138 people received three days' emergency food from the largest UK foodbank provider, Trussell Trust, in 2013-14, a 163% increase on figures for 2012/13, and a 1385% increase on 2010/11, when just 61,468 food parcels were distributed (Trussell Trust, 2014, unpaginated).

3.8.6 Looking forward, an uncertain future

At the time of writing, the 2015 General election campaign is beginning and there is very little indication of which (if any) party will win an overall majority in May 2015. In contrasting the social security policies of the coalition members and Labour, it is notable that some 'clear blue water' is perhaps beginning to emerge between the approaches of Labour and – most notably – the Conservatives. For example, Labour has started to speak of 'social security' rather than 'welfare' as part of an effort, perhaps, to re-claim the terms of the debate and encourage people to think a little more positively about the social welfare on which so many citizens depend (Miliband, 2013; Reeves, 2014; Reeves, 2015). Labour has also refused to be completely bound by the Conservatives' austerity plans, and has promised to repeal one of the coalition's most unpopular welfare reforms, the spare-room subsidy, now more commonly known as the Bedroom Tax (Labour, 2013; Wintour, 2014b). Labour's proposed Job Guarantee also represents a move towards job creation, as well as constituting a compulsory working scheme that actually pays the NMW (as opposed to government schemes which only pay benefit rates) (BBC, 2014). The Opposition is also putting considerable policy focus on improving living standards for the lowest paid in society, although this is still done from within a rhetorical rubric of the need to support 'hardworking families' (Helm, 2015; Miliband, 2013; Miliband, 2014).

By contrast, the Conservatives remain committed to their direction of welfare reform, and promise to make yet further cuts if they are returned to power, including £12bn of as yet unfunded cuts to working-age social security (Conservatives, 2015; Osborne, 2014). The Conservatives have proposed removing benefit eligibility for 18-21 year olds, and instead introducing an 'earn or learn' scheme (reminiscent of the principles behind Thatcher's YTS) (Cameron, 2014b), as well as completely freezing working-age benefits for the first two years of a new government (Osborne, 2014). Most recently, they have also discussed further schemes of compulsory work

experience for young people, as well as the possibility of sanctioning those on disability benefits who refuse treatment to deal with obesity, drug and alcohol issues (Patrick, 2015c; Swinford, 2015).

Whichever party, or coalition of parties, forms a government in May 2015, there is little doubt that the emphasis on welfare conditionality and welfare-to-work will remain, with conditionality now forming a central part of the 'welfare' offer. Today, it is possible to talk of a new welfare settlement that sees all the major parties in agreement over the central importance of paid employment for individual wellbeing and social inclusion; the key role of supply-side policies in increasing rates of employment (and the inevitable focus on individual's responsibility for their own unemployment that this entails) and the overarching reliance on welfare conditionality as *the* policy mechanism for increasing rates of employment (Deacon and Patrick, 2011). The main political parties also agree on the use of third and private sector agencies in the delivery of welfare, with all also showing a willingness to create and make use of neat (if unsustainable) divisions between populations of 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants' (2011). This political welfare settlement arguably overflows into and is part of a wider popular consensus on these issues which is itself tied to the dominant citizenship narratives explored in Chapter 2 (see Chapters 8&10).

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a necessarily brief overview of the UK welfare-to-work and welfare reform policy context, detailing both the overarching characteristics of current policy in these areas and its evolution over the past 35 years. This overview demonstrates the extent of the shift that has occurred from the central features of the post war welfare settlement (PWWS) to what is perhaps best characterised as a new welfare settlement (Deacon and Patrick, 2011). This shift represents a thorough reconfiguration of the UK's welfare state, and an allied reconceptualisation of the purpose of social welfare itself. Whereas under the PWWS, social welfare, and the provision of a (comparatively generous) safety net, were seen as positive elements of a 'good society' that offered necessary protection to all those who needed it (Timmins, 2001), today social welfare is increasingly characterised as an obstacle to individuals' fulfilling their personal responsibilities as working citizens. 'Welfare dependency' is constantly derided, with 'welfare' itself becoming a by-word for irresponsible behaviours such as passivity and idleness (2012). These negative attitudes towards social security have been mainstreamed, and are apparent in popular media, mainstream political pronouncements and the changing shape of

public opinion. The policy and rhetorical emphasis has shifted onto individuals' responsibilities, which are narrowly equated with paid employment (see Chapter 2). As individuals' responsibilities are foregrounded, the responsibilities of the state itself seem to retreat, with the 'problem' of unemployment conceptualised as at root a problem of character, responsibility and passivity, rather than a social issue (Newman, 2011; Taylor-Gooby and Stoker, 2011). The state's role increasingly becomes one of an enabler, through the provision of 'active welfare' that is bound up in, and contingent on, individuals taking steps to enter, or return to the paid labour market.

These shifts have evident citizenship implications, given that they have been accompanied by policy changes which have seen the gradual unravelling of the social security safety net, with the most vulnerable also the most adversely affected (Bradshaw, 2015). Importantly, some of the most recent reforms of the coalition, such as the Benefits Cap and some of the restrictions to Housing Benefit entitlement have also served to break the link between need and rights to support, with entitlement instead increasingly tied to behaviour (Grover, 2012). Bradshaw has described the safety net as now being 'in tatters' (2015), and there is no doubt that the social rights of citizenship have been considerably curtailed. Social rights have been devalued by cuts and reforms, as well as being made increasingly conditional, allied processes that operate together to undermine what little social citizenship can still offer to those living in poverty (see Chapter 10). The extension of work-related conditionality to many disabled people and single parents has been particularly significant, given that it further reduces the residual minority of citizens who are granted social welfare unconditionally, as of right.

Arguably, the overarching project of welfare reform under both New Labour and now the coalition is best construed as a moral project, underpinned by moral beliefs and expectations about individuals' responsibilities and behaviours and justified and pushed forward via the articulation of an explicitly moralising narrative. When considered in tandem with the dominant citizenship narratives (see Chapter 2), this project could be considered an attempt to embed and normalise the new welfare settlement, such that wider society becomes accepting of welfare conditionality, limited provision of social security support and, critically, individuals' responsibility for their (un)employment. In the following empirical analysis, there is an exploration of how the most recent welfare reforms are being experienced by those directly affected (see Chapters 7&8). Before discussing the empirical findings from this thesis, it is first essential to outline the methodological approach adopted in speaking

to people about their lived experiences of welfare reform, and this is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4 Employing qualitative longitudinal research to explore lived experiences of welfare reform

4.1 Introduction

In seeking answers to this project's research questions, a critical policy analysis and literature review was complemented by small-scale qualitative longitudinal research (QLR). This chapter describes the methodological approach here taken in conducting QLR in an effort to generate new knowledge and insight into the lived experiences of welfare reform. A commitment to reflexive and transparent research practices means that ethical issues are inevitably foregrounded, as are possible shortcomings with the methodologies and strategies employed. Although being 'open' about the inevitable challenges and possible weaknesses of a researcher's qualitative research practices can feel revealing and dangerous, it can only help to develop better methodological insight on behalf of both the researcher and the wider academic community (Patrick, 2012b).

This chapter first provides an outline of the theoretical and ethical orientations governing the research project, including the commitment to incorporating aspects of participatory research, before exploring the decision to employ a qualitative longitudinal methodology. This is followed by an outline of the particular methodological approach taken in utilising semi-structured interviews, working with two gatekeeper organisations and seeking to sustain contact with participants throughout the research period. Before concluding, there is a discussion of the data management, analysis, dissemination and impact strategies employed. The chapter demonstrates both the potential and challenges of working across time, detailing and defending the methodological approach taken.

4.2 Theoretical orientations

The starting point for this research was that effective academic theorising must incorporate and attend to individuals' perspectives and experiences, best achieved by talking and listening to people. This broadly aligns with an interpretivist epistemology, which places stress on asking insiders about their own views and experiences in order to gain insight and knowledge into the social world (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman, 2004). This research is based on the premise that by talking and listening to people it is possible to get at some wider social reality, a reality which exists independently of individual social actors. This fits well with a subtle realist perspective (Hammersley, 1992), which suggests that there are multiple

interpretations of reality, and that the only way to get close to the 'real' is by exploring people's realities – what we might also call their lifeworlds (Hammersley, 1992; Snape and Spencer, 2003). Research has value where it attempts to uncover people's representations as a route into discovering some aspect of the social world (Hammersley, 1992).

Incorporating these philosophical orientations, this research followed an abductive research strategy in seeking to generate sociological theories which are empirically grounded in the everyday accounts of research participants (Blaikie, 1993). Abductive research begins with an attempt to uncover the perceived reality of research participants by seeking out their own meanings, attitudes and perspectives, before producing a technical, social-science account which incorporates and represents the data generated (1993). Researchers move backwards and forwards between lay accounts and technical descriptions as their knowledge and explanatory accounts develop (Blaikie, 2000; Dwyer, 2000). Grounded theory, where data collection and data analysis are integrated and theory is developed by working upwards from the data, has been described as one of the clearest examples of abductive researching in practice (Blaikie, 1993). However, this was not the approach taken here, as this research sought to explicitly engage with and build on existing theories and technical accounts, doing so in a way that generated and prioritised knowledge rooted in the insider accounts of research participants. Theoretical concepts, most notably ideas of social citizenship, were of considerable import in designing and developing fieldwork materials and foci. Therefore, although an abductive research strategy was adopted, the specific approach suggested by grounded theory was not employed.

4.3 Proceeding qualitatively

Early on, it was decided that this research should employ qualitative methodologies, an approach which seemed to fit neatly with the epistemological and ontological standpoints orientating the study. The research sought to explore the lived experiences of welfare reform, a pursuit which required the generation of the thick description best obtained from in-depth qualitative research (Blaikie, 2000). Here, 'thick description' is understood to embody context and interpretation (Denzin, 1989; Geertz, 1973), capturing experiences, and their significance to individuals, with the potential therefore to answer 'how' and 'why' questions. Qualitative research provides scope for developing the depth of data which is critical to this exploration of the meaning, attitudes and perspectives of those directly affected by the coalition's welfare reforms. In prioritising depth over breadth of data, and choosing to take a

qualitative approach, it should also be noted that the qualitative research tradition is better suited to research which proceeds abductively in attempting to access the interpretations and attitudes of individual research participants (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Hakim, 2000).

There is more scope for trust and reciprocity to flourish in a qualitative interview setting, when contrasted with the inevitably more formal and structured approach implicit in a quantitative survey (Mason, 1996). Furthermore, there is more potential for conversation between researcher and participant, enabling the researcher to ask further questions to clarify and better understand points made by participants. For all these reasons, a qualitative research methodology was adopted and proved effective in developing 'thick description' and rich data.

4.4 Time as both vehicle and object of study

Importantly, 'time' is a central aspect of the study both in terms of the research strategy and design and as a theoretical construct and central focus of the research itself (see Chapter 1). Working through time, and focusing on how individuals 'do' time also complements the project's abductive research strategy, particularly the iterative movement backwards and forwards between participants' accounts and more technical and conceptual readings. Time as a medium for research provides a window through which we can observe this iteration, with particular potential for exploring the essentially dynamic interplay between structure and agency (Holland et al., 2004).

QLR describes qualitative data generation over a period of time, with particular emphasis placed on the processes by which change(s) occur (Smith, 2003). By seeking to uncover and better understand processes of change over time, one can also begin to develop improved comprehension of how research participants respond to and interpret changes in their own lives (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003; Pulkingham et al., 2010). In this case, it was felt that answering the research questions almost mandated a longitudinal approach, given the project's central interest in how individuals experienced and responded to changes in their benefits, and related interactions with the job centre and associated agencies.

Berthoud (2000) has contrasted the snapshot provided by cross-sectional research with the movie which longitudinal research can generate, where the researcher's sustained contact with her participants gives unparalleled scope for the 'long view' to emerge of the research participant(s)' experiences, attitudes and perceptions over a period of time (Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). Some QLR researchers talk of 'walking

alongside' their research participants (Henderson et al., 2006; Corsaro and Molinari 2000, cited in Neale and Flowerdew, 2003), observing them living and responding to processes of change. The researcher builds a repertoire of the participants' reactions and responses to change, responses which can be read against one another and will often reveal interesting tensions and dilemmas (McLeod, 2003). Evidently, there is potential to achieve a great richness of data – with a depth of analysis made possible by the repeated interactions between researcher and participant (Thomson, 2007). The QLR approach incorporates flexibility and the scope to develop and interrogate insights and themes emerging from earlier waves in subsequent interviews (Neale et al., 2012). The iterative dimension of this research strategy enabled the researcher to generate data grounded in the accounts and experiences of the research participants themselves.

The research's interest in social policy attempts to alter human behaviour provided a further logic to researching through and across time. As Corden and Millar note:

[QLR's]...focus on change, both how people change and on how people respond to change, is very relevant in the current policy context in which individual behaviour change is seen as key to achieving desired policy goals (2007a p.529).

QLR is a vital method in the researcher's tool bag when seeking to explore social policies focused on engineering behavioural change (Ridge and Millar, 2011; Thomson, 2007), and is particularly valuable in research concerned with the processes by which policies do or do not achieve the desired change, and in explorations of how policies are received by their target population. The current welfare reform project is motivated by efforts to encourage people off 'welfare' and into work, as well as a broader objective to end the supposed culture of 'welfare dependency'. By proceeding longitudinally and exploring how out-of-work benefit recipients themselves experience these welfare reforms, there was scope to uncover how and why people's behaviour and attitudes change in light of a shifting welfare landscape.

QLR is here generative of theory, bringing time, process and change to the centre of the theoretical project (Holland et al., 2004). The research sought to explore the extent of a (mis)match between dominant citizenship narratives emanating from governments and the lived experiences of those directly affected by welfare reforms (see Chapter 1). The temporal picture of welfare reform theorised by the government often clashes with that experienced at the micro-level by individual claimants. Indeed, a particular objective of this research was to highlight

connections and tensions between macro-change as determined and set out in government policy with the reality of micro-change in individual lives (see Chapter 1).

As with any research methodology, QLR brings with it particular strengths and possibilities as well, inevitably, as specific challenges. Given the strong fit between this research's orientation and QLR's capacity to explore how people respond to policy interventions over time, the potential of the method was felt to outweigh its possible shortcomings. The various challenges of the method are discussed throughout this chapter but they include heightened ethical considerations, the difficulty of sustaining contact with participants over time and the additional intellectual labour required to effectively analyse longitudinal data (Henderson et al., 2012; Neale et al., 2012). Despite the issues and challenges with QLR, in reflexively considering the employment of the method the researcher is left with a strong sense of its rich potential in exploring social policy interventions and landscapes. By returning to participants on several occasions, the 'thick description' generated by qualitative research becomes both more detailed and dense (even 'thicker') as well as more dynamic and fluid as participants are given repeated opportunities to reflect both on their own lives and the social policy interventions directly affecting them. The relationships built and developed on repeated interactions almost inevitably lead to a greater openness on the part of the research participant, and a stronger reciprocal understanding between researcher and 'researched'. QLR remains an under-used method, and one which this study demonstrates can be effectively undertaken within the confines of doctoral study.

4.5 A question of ethics

QLR brings ethical questions into sharp focus given that repeated research encounters deepen the nature of the research relationship, with the result that ethical complexities are inevitably magnified (Henderson et al., 2012; Neale, 2013; Neale et al., 2012; Thomson and McLeod, 2015). In this study, the ethical dimension was understood as an integral component of this research, and not something that could be considered in isolation. A stakeholder approach to ethics was adopted, where it is recognised that, while both the ethical considerations of the research participants and researcher herself should be prioritised, there is also scope to consider the ethical implications of the research for other stakeholders including funder(s), gatekeeper(s), the wider academic community and intended research audience(s) (Neale and Hanna, 2012). Furthermore, the study drew on the work of Holland et al (2014) in conceptualising the ethical plane as one where an ethics of justice, of rights and responsibilities to research participants, needs to be complemented by a

consideration of an ethics of care (Tronto, 1994), particularly when taking decisions in the field. This research drew on an ethics of care approach to forefront reciprocity and the need to move beyond an abstract discourse of rights and responsibilities to make ethical decisions which are ultimately particular and context specific (Tronto, 1994).

Good ethical practice necessitates a consideration of ethical dilemmas that is both pro-active and re-active (Neale and Hanna, 2012). Developing effective research strategies that comply with ethical guidelines and the individuals' own moral framework when pro-actively planning and designing the research is arguably easier than the reactive decisions that frequently have to be made 'in the field' as and when particular ethical dilemmas arise. While the researcher can always draw on overarching principles of 'good' ethical research practice, it is also important to be prepared to make procedural ethical decisions as the study progresses (Neale and Hanna, 2012; Wiles, 2013). Arguably, proactive strategies relate more closely to an ethics of social justice, whereas those relating to ethics in action are here grounded in an ethics of care (Holland et al., 2014).

Ethical dilemmas, which demand a reactive response, can be conceptualised as 'ethical speed-bumps' that cannot be anticipated in advance of the research (Weiss and Fine, 2000). In trying to resolve the issues that emerged in this study, the researcher was guided by the principles of reciprocity, transparency, the avoidance of harm wherever possible and an overarching commitment to an ethic of care. By their very nature, contextual ethical dilemmas are morally challenging and require researchers to consider their own personal moral and ethical reasoning, as well as the guidance provided by more formal ethical frameworks and guidelines (Wiles, 2013). Rather than having a separate, discrete ethics section, the ethical dimension is woven into this chapter, with the following sections including discussion of both the proactive strategies adopted and the ethical dilemmas encountered during the research journey.

4.6 Attempting to incorporate aspects of participatory research practice

Deciding to incorporate aspects of participatory research practice was itself an ethical decision, with a primary objective of the research to encourage and hopefully enable research participants to help shape aspects of the research process.

Research should, wherever possible, be done 'with' rather than 'on' people and increasing the partnership potential in the researcher- participant relationship has scope to improve both the validity of findings and reach of non-academic

dissemination (Frankham, 2009; Maguire, 1987). When conducting qualitative research, the researcher's power generally far outweighs that of the participant(s), leading to research which often mirrors and reproduces hierarchical practices in society at large (Briggs, 2003). By surrendering even a little control, the researcher can help mediate and begin to soften these power dynamics, although it is unlikely that these can be completely de-stabilised by participatory research alone.

While recognising that a fully participatory research project was neither suitable nor achievable for this study, the researcher did incorporate participatory elements into the research design. Later in this chapter, there is an exploration of two key elements of this participatory research practice; the establishment of research steering groups and the creation of an accessible output from the study, the *Dole Animators* film. Having outlined the key theoretical and ethical orientations governing this study, this chapter now turns to a consideration of the particular methodological choices made and strategies employed, exploring the utilisation of QLR and semi-structured interviews, and the approach taken to recruitment and sampling.

4.7 Methodological matters

4.7.1 Researching through time

In adopting a QLR methodology, a small sample of out-of-work benefit claimants were interviewed three times during a comparatively short time period of 20 months, with second and third interviews conducted approximately three and fifteen months after the first. It should be noted that while the 'longitudinal' in QLR might suggest 'long' time periods, the method is in fact far more flexible and is often well suited for tracking people more intensely over a comparatively short timeframe (Neale, 2015, in press). This is particularly the case where researchers are interested in individuals' responses to processes, transitions and reforms – as was the case in this study. All that QLR dictates is that time becomes both an object and vehicle of study (Henwood and Shirani, 2012; Neale, 2015, in press), and that researchers adopting this methodology engage with their participants on more than one occasion with a particular focus on both time and change (Saldaña, 2003). For the purposes of this research project, and given the resource limitations implicit in doctoral study, it was neither possible nor desirable to track welfare claimants for a longer time period. The elongated timeframe of the study's fieldwork period was made possible by the researcher's maternity leave and subsequent switch from full-time to part-time study

following the birth of her daughter, an example of research and individual timelines intersecting in ways which proved to benefit the study's research design.

4.7.2 Informed consent and anonymity

In arranging the first wave of interviews, each participant was sent an information sheet outlining details of the research project (see Appendix One). This was always sent out at least a week before the date of the first interview. At the start of the first interview, participants were asked if they had read the information sheet and if they had any questions arising from it. Where they said they had not read it, the researcher went through it with them, point by point. The consent forms (see Appendix Two) were then discussed and signed before proceeding with the interview. In QLR, informed consent is best understood as an ongoing process given that it is ethically necessary to 'refresh and remind' participants about the research and what they are consenting to by agreeing to participate at each subsequent interview (Neale and Bishop, 2012; Neale and Hanna, 2012). This was the approach taken here. At the second and third interviews, the researcher always started with a brief overview of the study, focusing on the ways in which anonymity, confidentiality and archiving were being managed.

Following academic protocols, the researcher sought to guarantee research participants' anonymity by assigning each participant a pseudonym and editing interview data to remove information through which they might be identified. Confidentiality was also prioritised, and the only reasons why confidentiality would ever be breached (if they or someone else was felt to be at risk of harm) were carefully explained to participants in both the information sheet, as well as in the consent form discussion at the start of the first interview.

4.7.3 Recruitment and sampling

4.7.3.1 The study's location

Perhaps best conceptualised as a geographically bounded longitudinal case study, this research sought to recruit a small sample of individuals experiencing changes to their benefit provision as a result of the coalition's welfare reforms. The study was based in Leeds, which contains a higher rate of unemployment than the national average. The DWP suggests as a proxy for 'worklessness' the total number claiming any of the following: JSA, ESA, IB and other income-related, working-age benefits (Leeds City Council, 2012). In Leeds, the 'worklessness' rate was 12% in 2012, comparable to the rate in a number of other major cities (such as Sheffield, Edinburgh and Newcastle) but considerably lower than the rate in cities such as Liverpool (22%) and Glasgow (21%) (2012, p.27). The experience of claiming out-

of-work benefits in Leeds may well be in some ways geographically specific and this should be borne in mind when considering the research's findings. On the other hand, many of the main findings from the research are mirrored by studies exploring similar themes in different locations (O'Hara, 2014; Real Life Reform, 2014; Roberts et al., 2014; Shildrick et al., 2012b), suggesting that there is also significant commonality in the experiences of benefit claiming across the UK. Locating the study in the researcher's home city had real advantages in ensuring she had some shared understanding of the geography and physical life of the wider environment in which participants lived. While including more than one geographical area in the study was explored, it was felt that this would make the commitment to aspects of participatory research practice less feasible due to the resource limitations implicit to doctoral study.

4.7.3.2 Purposive sampling

In developing a robust and realistic sampling strategy, the researcher quickly discounted probability sampling, best suited for quantitative methods, instead opting for a purposive or 'purposeful' approach (Patton, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2003a). Following the logic of purposive sampling, the decisions regarding whom to sample and why have been conceptually driven, with a particular concern to sample those participants most likely to advance knowledge on the processes and experiences central to the concerns of this research (Bryman, 2004; Gerson and Horowitz, 2002; Patton, 2002). The individual rather than their broader household has been taken as the sampling unit, with the goal of exploring individual life histories and attitudes, which can themselves be situated within broader contextual data such as household composition through in-depth, repeated interviews with participants.

The primary selection criterion was that each participant could expect to experience some welfare reform related to claiming an out-of-work benefit during the period of fieldwork (which ran from July 2011 – February 2013). A detailed timeline of the implementation dates of all welfare reforms announced by the coalition was prepared to highlight reforms introduced in 2011 and 2012. Importantly, some changes affected almost all out-of-work benefit claimants, but particular reforms which the sample sought to capture included the migration of IB claimants onto ESA, the reduction in age of youngest child at which single parents are migrated onto JSA from seven to five, and the tightening of the sanctioning and job search regime at Job Centre Plus (JCP). Therefore, to ensure that the research spoke to people directly affected by each of these reforms the sampling strategy aimed to include disabled people, single parents and 'young' jobseekers (between 18 and 25), with all reliant on out-of-work benefits at the start of the fieldwork. Although not seeking to

be representative of the total population, the sample was designed to include a mixture of men and women, and in the event a range of ages were recruited, as were some participants from ethnic minority communities. As the focus was on reliance on working-age benefits, the age profile of participants reflected this, with participants ranging in age at first interview from 19 to their late 50s. Care was also taken to include people who had been on out-of-work benefits for varying periods of time to encompass a range of experiences.

An initial sample of 22 individuals was recruited to participate in the first interview wave. From this cohort, a smaller sample of 15 participants was selected to follow over time. In refining the sample that would be followed longitudinally, the researcher chose to exclude those whose initial interviews had suggested were less likely to experience welfare reforms during the timeframe of the fieldwork. In refining the sample, the researcher was also careful to include the experiences of disabled people, single parents and jobseekers while also ensuring that the sample was diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity and age breakdown.

The table below provides an outline of the key characteristics of the research sample. For more detailed introductions to each individual interviewed, pen pictures of the participants are provided in Appendix Three. As this table shows, the main demographic change in reducing the sample to follow longitudinally was a considerable reduction in the number of disabled people from 12 to five. Disabled people were deliberately over-represented in the initial sample as the researcher recognised that not all of those on IB would experience a transition onto ESA during the fieldwork timeframe. In reducing the sample, she sought to follow only those disabled people who she believed were most likely to be assessed for ESA in the next twelve months. The selection of the sub-sample to follow longitudinally required careful reflection and in effect began the analytical project.

Table 2 Research participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Age group (at first interview)	Benefit claiming category	Followed longitudinally
Adrian	M	White British	18-24	young jobseeker	✓
Amy	F	White British	25-34	disability benefit(s) recipient	
Beckie	F	White British	55-64	disability benefit(s) recipient	
Cath	F	White British	55-64	disability benefit(s) recipient	✓
Chloe	F	White British	25-34	single parent	✓
Dan	M	Caribbean	35-44	disability benefit(s) recipient	
Isobella	F	White British	55-64	disability benefit(s) recipient	✓
James	M	White British	18-24	young jobseeker	✓
JD	M	White British	45-54	disability benefit(s) recipient	
Jim	M	White British	25-34	disability benefit(s) recipient	
Jessica	F	White British	35-44	disability benefit(s) recipient	
Josh	M	White British	18-24	young jobseeker	✓
Kane	M	White British	25-34	disability benefit(s) recipient	✓
Karen	F	White British	25-34	single parent	✓
Robert	M	White British	18-24	young jobseeker	✓
Rosie	F	White British	25-34	single parent	✓
Sam	F	White British	18-24	young jobseeker	✓
Sharon	F	White British	18-24	disability benefit(s) recipient	✓
Sophie	F	White British	35-34	single parent	✓
Susan	F	African	45-54	single parent	✓
Terri	F	White British	35-44	disability benefit(s) recipient	
Tessa	F	White British	35-44	disability benefit(s) recipient	✓

4.7.3.3 Working with gatekeepers

In seeking to construct a sampling frame from which the initial sample could be drawn, the researcher opted to work with gatekeeper organisations. There are well-documented benefits to recruiting participants through a gatekeeper organisation, as they can help mediate access and lend credibility to, and trust in, the research effort (Emmel et al., 2007; Merkens, 2004; Ritchie et al., 2003a). In recruiting 'hard-to-reach' individuals, comprehensive gatekeepers (who provide a range of supportive interventions) have been found to be most likely to lead to effective recruitment, particularly when contrasted with formal (often statutory) gatekeepers who are often treated with hostility by potential participants and thus do not always provide an effective access route (Emmel et al., 2007).

This research hoped to access some 'harder-to-reach' participants, and to this end partnerships were sought with a number of comprehensive gatekeepers. After a meeting with a senior manager, a small charity providing support to young people and families agreed to participate in this research. This charity is best conceptualised as a comprehensive gatekeeper, given that they work closely with individuals in a supportive role that is not seen as regulatory or supervisory. Indeed, the charity has very strong local standing in the community where it is based, and its involvement in the research led credibility to the research when discussing it with potential participants. Additionally, a much bigger organisation, a medium-sized housing association, also engaged with the research and agreed to act as a second gatekeeper. The housing association is best understood as a more formal gatekeeper, given that they do have a supervisory role in terms of ensuring tenants are keeping to the terms of their tenancy agreement and paying their rent.

The two organisations had very different structures and processes, and engaged with the research in very different ways. While the sample was almost equally split between participants recruited through each of the two gatekeepers, the mechanisms for securing that recruitment were quite different. The charity employed two welfare rights workers, and these individual staff members were critical in highlighting and passing on the details of possible participants. The advice workers often spoke to the possible participants on the researcher's behalf and played a critical brokerage role in securing their engagement. Furthermore, the researcher attended team meetings at the charity where she introduced the research to staff members and encouraged support workers to speak to their service users about becoming involved in the research. Again, this led to a number of recruitment leads, and staff members often rang the researcher to discuss the suitability of one of their service users for the research. The welfare rights workers and support workers were

provided with flyers for the research, as well as consent forms for the participants to complete if they were willing for their contact details to be passed to the researcher. Finally, the researcher also attended groups run by the charity, including a group for survivors of domestic violence. Here, she was able to explain the purpose and nature of the research and talk directly to potential research participants.

By contrast, the housing association had initially promised to secure participants via a programme of tenant visits to find out how they were managing in their properties, and if they were likely to be affected by any of the forthcoming welfare reforms. Unfortunately, though, these home visits were subject to significant delays and so were not rolled out across the organisation until the recruitment was almost completed. Instead, the housing association provided the researcher with opportunities to advertise the research via flyers in their reception area, and through articles in their tenants' magazine. It was through these routes that most of the housing association participants were recruited, a more indirect and less personalised form of recruitment.

In comparing the recruitment trajectories of the two gatekeepers, it is notable that the more comprehensive gatekeeper had a more active role in securing participants for the research. Further, many of the participants who were recruited from the charity could be classified as 'hard-to-reach' and it would have been very difficult to access them through more conventional routes. It is possible that the strength of relationships of trust and safety that exist between the charity and its service users were temporarily extended to the researcher, given that the charity was explicitly promoting engagement with the research. The housing association's role in the research was much further removed.

The recruitment experiences of this study demonstrate the value in working with comprehensive gatekeepers, particularly important when trying to access 'hard-to-reach' participants, as Emmel et al (2007) have argued. Inevitably, working with these gatekeepers impacted upon whom the researcher could access, with all those not working with either gatekeeper inevitably excluded. However, the sample was not seeking to be representative and, as a purposive sample, was effective in securing a range of participants all experiencing the consequences of welfare reform.

4.7.4 Semi-structured interviews, 'conversations with a purpose'

In this study, semi-structured interviews with out-of-work benefit claimants have been utilised to generate relevant data for answering many of the research questions. These semi-structured interviews are best conceptualised as 'conversations with a

purpose' (Legard et al., 2003; Mason, 1996), which sought to discuss experiences of and attitudes towards welfare reform, welfare-to-work policies and personal responsibilities. Interviews were felt to be the most suitable method for exploring these subjective meanings, and relate best to the epistemological framework governing the research. Generating relevant data from the interviews demanded effective and sensitive interviewing practices, as well as the development of topic guides well integrated with the central research questions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009; Rubin and Rubin, 2005). In this case, the interviews were semi-structured with the first interview focused on gaining insight into the participants' past, present and anticipated future lives (Corden and Nice, 2006; Holland, 2007; Mason, 1996). Baseline data were generated in the first interviews to establish both basic demographic information (economic activity, household composition, approximate income), and attitudes towards welfare reform and welfare-to-work interventions. These data were critical in helping to ascertain both presence and absence of change(s) in participant's lives during the course of the longitudinal fieldwork (Holland, 2007; Saldaña, 2003).

The first wave topic guide and the interviews themselves attempted to combine an element of structure with flexibility, allowing the researcher to respond to and be directed by the particular issues introduced and highlighted by the interviewees themselves (Gaskell, 2000; Gerson and Horowitz, 2002; Legard et al., 2003). This worked effectively, with participants tending to focus in on particular elements of the topic guide. Often, this led on to a discussion which touched on aspects that the researcher had planned to ask at a later stage of the interview. By building flexibility into the interviews, the researcher was able to allow this deviation and could employ the topic guide more as a crib sheet, to ensure that all the essential topics had been covered at some stage of the interview. The first wave of semi-structured interviews was piloted to allow scope to refine and rethink aspects of the topic guide if necessary. Following three pilot or 'pioneering' interviews, the topic guide was slightly amended.

For the second and third wave of interviews, the researcher developed tailored topic guides for each participant to reflect on, and further explore, issues raised in earlier interviews. As well as questions to follow up on individuals' particular welfare reform experiences, a range of common questions were asked of each participant to aid cross-case comparability and help ensure that key research areas were covered (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000). Given the iterative nature of the analytical approach, questions were also generated from the analysis of earlier interview waves in order to refine and develop emergent themes and findings. In QLR, there

is considerable scope for the researcher to pick up themes and issues emerging in early interviews and return to these themes, exploring them in more depth with participants in subsequent encounters (Neale et al., 2012). In this way, findings from one wave of research can be used to inform the design of the next - an opportunity to mine for emergent themes and to allow these themes to develop organically (Smith, 2003).

A retrospective dimension was built into each interview, but particularly the final one when participants were asked to look back over the 'researched time frame' and consider how and whether they felt they had changed or experienced any key moments of particular import in their own lives. Furthermore, at each interview participants were asked about their imagined futures and how far they saw their out-of-work benefits and involvement with official agencies either aiding or constraining their aspirations. Thus, the research moved backwards and forwards to develop retrospective reflections, contemporary insights and future-orientated expectations, and there were invaluable opportunities to contrast expectations with actual happenings in subsequent interviews (Farrall, 2006; Neale et al., 2012). There is great potential in this recursive form of data generation (Walker and Leisering, 1998) which enables a dynamic exploration of how people experience and respond to change, almost as it happens, particularly where intervals between waves of data generation are comparatively short as in this study.

4.7.5 Beyond interview questions: employing other interview techniques

As well as traditional open questions, vignettes were also employed. In the first and final interview, the participants were presented with imaginary scenarios featuring individuals affected by the government's welfare reforms (see Appendix Four). One scenario was provided for each benefit claiming 'group' featured in the research, with vignettes regarding a young job seeker, disabled benefit claimant and single parent. To aid comparability over time, the three scenarios were broadly similar in each wave so they provided one mechanism to consider if and in what ways attitudes towards welfare reforms had changed during the research timeframe. In addition to vignettes, at each interview the researcher presented participants with excerpts of quotations from government and opposition members, including David Cameron and Ed Miliband. The researcher read the quotation aloud, as well as providing it on a piece of card to the participant, and then asked them for their thoughts and responses to what they had heard. These quotations typically generated strong responses as participants reasoned with and – frequently – critiqued politicians' arguments. These quotations were an invaluable opportunity to contrast the

government rhetoric on welfare reform with the lived realities, and were a popular element of the research interviews with participants.

In addition to these interview tools, a range of graphic elicitation and projective techniques were also employed to make the interviews as participatory and engaging as possible (Bagnoli, 2009; Hanna and Lau-Clayton, 2012). In their first interviews, participants were invited to construct timelines which sought to map their past, present and imagined futures (Bagnoli, 2009; Holland et al., 2004; Thomson and Holland, 2003). Participants were encouraged to include details regarding the benefits they claimed and any experience of paid work on these timelines, which proved effective in generating discussion around their life histories and aspirations for the future. These timelines were then revisited at the second wave to see how far imagined futures had meshed with real world happenings, and how these futures then evolved as the research proceeded.

At the second interview, participants also completed a timeline for the next year where they outlined their plans, hopes and fears for the year ahead. This built on a thematic analysis of the first wave data which identified marked differences between how participants 'did' the future, and how far planning, hopes and aspirations for change formed a central part of their day-to-day lives. Constructing a timeline that explicitly asked participants about their hopes and plans enabled further exploration of this theme. A year later, in the final interview, these timelines were re-examined to consider which of their plans, hopes and fears had been realised (see Chapter 9).

The task based graphic elicitation exercises employed featured a second wave exercise where participants were asked to imagine, and then draw, what they would consider to be a 'perfect' back-to-work adviser. The objective was to encourage them to contemplate what help and advice they would welcome from an agency such as Job Centre Plus, and this exercise led to discussions where participants frequently developed contrasts between the help they would like to receive and what was in fact provided to them (see Chapter 6). In the final interviews, participants were presented with a set of cards on which were listed potential barriers to paid employment. They were asked to select those that applied to them before ranking them in order of importance, and placing them on a piece of A4 paper. Again, this proved a useful exercise, both providing a break from the straightforward questioning format, and leading to valuable deliberations regarding people's understanding of their barriers to paid employment.

The researcher analysed the various data generated from these graphic elicitation techniques (timelines, back-to-work adviser pictures and barrier to work 'towers') as

data in their own right alongside the conversational data from the interviews themselves. There is real potential in incorporating task-based and graphic elicitation techniques into semi-structured interviews. While the scope for incorporating timelines into QLR is well known, there has perhaps been less written about more task-based exercises, such as the barriers to work and back-to-work adviser tasks utilised in this study. Participants enjoyed the chance to physically 'do' something, and the discussions that accompanied the research also tapped into attitudes, experiences and perspectives not captured elsewhere in responses to interview questions.

4.8 Conducting the interviews

4.8.1 Changing relationships

The interviews with each participant were critical junctures in a dynamic research relationship, which was subject to significant changes over time. Notably, while several participants were fairly reticent and reserved in the first wave of interviews, by the second and third wave they were often much more open and engaged in discussion. As the researcher returned to see participants, she often noted how the interviews became longer with each successive wave as participants became more ready to share aspects of their lives that previously remained hidden. For example, Robert's first interview was a brief thirty minute exchange on his doorstep, the second fifty minutes, while the third involved a ninety minute discussion of how his life had changed since the last interview as well as his perspectives on the government's reforms. This example hints at the value of investing in a relationship with research participants over time, as it was only through the strengthening of that relationship at subsequent waves that more detailed data often emerged.

Frequently, the disclosure of particularly difficult life experiences – or attitudes and behaviours which they might have been wary to share with a researcher – occurred in the second, and, most often, the third interviews, by which time a strong research relationship had been forged. This is a real advantage of employing a QLR approach (Neale and Hanna, 2012).

Critics of the research design adopted here might question the likelihood of out-of-work benefit claimants being ready and willing to speak truthfully about their experiences, suggesting instead that they might provide selective accounts which sought to paint themselves in a favourable light (Dunn, 2014). However, this was not the case, with participants often speaking very frankly about how they managed to survive on benefits, with several explaining how they occasionally shoplifted, worked

'cash in hand' and so on (see Chapters 5&6). Arguably, the willingness of participants to share such experiences suggests that they felt able to talk openly, understanding that the research space created for them was a confidential and non-judgemental one.

4.8.2 The reciprocal research relationship

The researcher decided from the outset that she wanted to think about the research encounter(s) as a reciprocal one, and be willing and ready to disclose information about herself where appropriate. Feminist researchers have long argued for 'no intimacy without reciprocity' (Oakley, 1981), and the researcher prioritised open and transparent communication, and was prepared to disclose information about herself if this was asked for by the research participants. During the first and second wave of interviews, the researcher was pregnant and many of the participants enquired about this and asked for news about the arrival of the baby. This information was provided, and the researcher texted many of the participants to let them know when her daughter was born. The researcher was comfortable sharing this information, and it certainly helped develop strong research relationships. In addition, a decision was made that a gift voucher of £10 should be provided to participants after each interview. This was not conceptualised as a payment, but as a way of thanking participants for giving up their time to meet with the researcher and share their own experiences of welfare reform.

Given her experiences as a welfare rights adviser, the researcher decided that where basic welfare rights advice was likely to make a material positive difference to an interviewee's situation, she would provide such advice in the course of the interview. Where advice was provided, participants were also signposted onto another agency, but being prepared to provide this advice, if appropriate, was conceptualised as an important part of the reciprocal offer. This actually occurred more frequently than the researcher had envisaged, with advice being provided on reducing deductions being taken from benefits, the process for appealing benefit decisions and the possibility of gaining advice and further help with debts. In this extract from an interview, Sophie explains how she has used the researcher's advice to reduce the rate at which she was repaying a crisis loan:

Interviewer: When we first met you talked about the reductions that you were having taken off your benefits. Things like social fund loans and stuff.

I sorted that.

Interviewer: Did you sort it?

I wrote them a letter, quite posh. Said what I had to say but not in a nasty way...

Interviewer: Did they reduce it?

Yeah to £7.49...So it's gone from £68 a fortnight to £119 a fortnight which has helped me out. It's a hell of a lot that they were taking off.

Interviewer: So your money's gone up nearly 50 quid a fortnight.

Double yeah.

This example shows how relatively rudimentary advice – that it is possible to request a reduced rate of Social Fund repayment – could have a significant impact on the material circumstances of the participants. Undoubtedly, being £50 a fortnight better off will have changed Sophie's experiences of living on out-of-work benefits, and this could be conceptualised as a weakness of the research, in that the researcher's intervention directly contributed to this improvement in her circumstances. However, intervening in this way was seen to be ethical and the provision of such support may have contributed to the comparatively high levels of engagement by participants in the research, given the reciprocal nature of the relationship established.

4.8.3 Staying safe

In most cases, the interviews were conducted in participants' own homes and this required careful risk assessment and management strategies to be in place given the unpredictability inherent in unknown home environments (Holland et al., 2014). Good lone worker protocols were followed, including the University of Leeds Lone Working Guidance (University of Leeds, 2011), and a blackboard system was established where the researcher rang in after each interview to confirm she was safe. In cases where potential participants contacted the researcher directly (for example, after seeing an article in the housing association's magazine), interviews were arranged in public places such as cafes or libraries. Given that some of the interviews were distressing for the researcher, due to the disclosure of difficult pasts, and - on one occasion - suicidal thoughts, the researcher always took time to reflect on difficult interviews, and to discuss these encounters in detail with her doctoral supervisors in an effort to ensure the 'emotional care' of the researcher (Holland et al., 2014). Conducting the interviews was the most challenging but also the most rewarding aspect of the whole research process.

4.9 Research steering groups

As part of the commitment to incorporating aspects of participatory research, a research steering group was established, which met three times in the course of the study to discuss the direction and design of the research. Given that the researcher was working with two gatekeeper organisations to recruit suitable participants, it seemed most appropriate initially to organise two steering groups which met at the gatekeepers' respective offices. As well as participants from the research, staff members from each gatekeeper also sat on the steering groups. Initially, steering group membership included individuals working with the gatekeepers who did not necessarily intend to participate in the research themselves, given that they were not being directly affected by welfare reform. Nonetheless, the involvement of these service users at the first steering group meetings was invaluable, as they helped the researcher to develop her ideas for the topic guide and decide how best to thank participants for their time.

Subsequent steering group meetings had a slightly different make up, with those who had been interviewed invited to take part. They were held at the office of the charity, as the housing association's engagement with the research tailed off over time. A total of six participants attended the further two meetings which were organised so they fell half way through the project, and then towards its conclusion, so that the final meetings could explore plans for dissemination and maximising impact. Again, discussion from these meetings impacted upon the research's strategy and design. For example, in the second series of steering groups (at the midway stage of the project) participants suggested that a Facebook group be established for the research. This was then set up, and regularly updated to keep participants informed about the research. Further, participants also spoke about trying to develop outputs that were more engaging and inclusive, and it is for this reason that ideas to develop a more participatory output were pursued.

The steering groups were an effective mechanism in both engaging participants in the research and in allowing the researcher to draw on participants' perspectives and expertise in developing an effective research design. Given the qualitative longitudinal nature of the study, sustaining the engagement and interest of steering group participants over time was a real challenge, and it was not possible to secure a stable steering group membership, as different people attended each meeting. This lack of consistency in attendance made it difficult to continue conversations and dialogue developed in one meeting onto the next, and meant that each meeting had to function as a standalone encounter. The comparatively long timeframe for the

research - with almost four years between the first and the last steering group meeting - made repeated engagement with group members problematic. Had the project had more resources, there might have been scope to organise more regular meetings, which could have increased the possibility of sustaining a more stable and consistent group membership.

4.10 The challenge of sustaining engagement over time

The QLR methodology also created a particular challenge in terms of efforts to sustain contact with participants throughout the course of the study, something repeatedly highlighted in the literature (Hemmerman, 2010; Henwood and Shirani, 2012; Patrick, 2012d; Weller, 2010). The very nature of QLR necessitates repeated interactions that can only be successfully secured by creating and sustaining relationships with research participants over time. While this is sometimes conceptualised as a 'problem' or even a disadvantage of QLR, it is better understood as a rich challenge, given that the very act of sustaining contact can in itself lead to the development of valuable data as well as being generative of stronger and more effective research relationships (Neale et al., 2012). Given that this research was conducted with what might be described as a 'hard to reach' population, the challenge of sustaining contact between interview waves was particularly acute as individuals were often leading relatively chaotic lives and regularly changing contact details, such as mobile phone numbers and addresses.

4.10.1 Strategies for sustaining contact

As the sample was fairly small, significant resources were devoted to efforts to sustain contact with participants, with a range of complementary strategies deployed. At the first interview, participants were asked to provide both their own contact details as well as contact details for a 'link person' that the researcher was given permission to contact if they could not get hold of the participant through the details originally supplied. In the case of young adults (those under 25), the telephone number of parents was often provided and these did sometimes prove a helpful way of contacting the participant where they had changed mobile phone numbers and so were not directly reachable. In addition, the researcher set up a Facebook account specifically for the research and asked participants if they would accept a friend request from this account. Most were on Facebook and happy to be 'friends' with the researcher, and this provided a very effective mechanism for keeping in touch with participants online. In some cases, it proved decisive in efforts to sustain contact. For example one participant, Kane, was sentenced to prison following a

period of very poor mental health. Kane's mother got in touch with the researcher on Kane's Facebook account to let her know what was happening and, as a result, the researcher was able to first visit and then interview Kane in prison.

In addition to Facebook, the researcher also rang and/or texted participants every few months to make contact, provide a brief update about the research and find out how they were getting on with regard to the relevant welfare reforms. These phone calls often generated important data regarding changes which were happening between interview waves, and also prompted particular interview questions to be followed up at the next formal research encounter. As well as telephone catch ups, on occasion the researcher visited participants in person. This only occurred in a few instances, predominately between the second and third wave, when the researcher was on maternity leave from her doctoral studies. On three occasions, the researcher brought her new baby along with her where participants had expressed particular keenness to meet the new arrival. This was felt to be consistent with ethically sound research practices, given that the researcher had decided early on that she was in a reciprocal relationship with the participants. When dropping in on participants, the researcher was careful to focus discussion on how the participant was doing and only to stay for a relatively short time.

On one such occasion, the researcher went to see Susan, a single parent claiming JSA as she struggled to find work. Shortly after the researcher arrived, Susan presented the researcher with a wrapped gift for the baby. This unexpected present clearly created a sharp ethical conundrum, as there was perhaps some blurring of boundaries between the relationship of researcher – research participant and one in which gift giving and receiving would be more common, perhaps one of friendship. The researcher had to respond immediately, and decided to accept the gift, which was a dress for her baby. While feeling uncomfortable and unsettled about this decision, the researcher felt that harm could be caused by refusing the gift, as this might well have offended the participant. The giving and receiving of gifts to coincide with the arrival of new children is a common cultural practice, and perhaps the researcher should have foreseen that such an occurrence might arise. While others might have resolved this dilemma differently, accepting the gift best fitted with the researcher's own moral and ethical framework (Patrick, 2012b).

Participants were also sent Christmas cards in 2011 and 2012, along with a research newsletter update to keep them informed of the project's progress. All participants were also asked if they wanted to receive typed transcripts of their interviews. Most did and these were posted out following transcription and so provided another point of contact between researcher and participants. In addition, the elements of

participatory research practice and, in particular, the research steering groups, provided an additional mechanism for sustaining both contact and the engagement of research participants. Overall, the various mechanisms employed proved successful, and the researcher managed to generate longitudinal data on all fifteen of the participants whom she set out to follow longitudinally. She lost contact with only one participant – Karen – with whom she was unable to arrange a third interview.

4.10.2 The ethics of sustaining contact

There is a difficult balance to be struck between developing research practices that effectively sustain engagement and build trust, and the risk of creating a relationship where the participant can become over-dependent on the researcher (Neale and Hanna, 2012). There are also inevitable emotional risks to both the researcher and participants (Neale and Hanna, 2012), where the nature of the repeated interactions can lead to a deeper and more complicated relationship being created between researcher and researched. Managing this was not easy, and required careful reflection and continual reconsideration of the strategies employed. It also, arguably, required a basic acceptance of the shared humanity of all participants in the research process and the associated recognition that just as participants' lives are often messy and complex, so too are the very encounters that facilitate discussion about these lives (Patrick, 2012d).

Ultimately, working over time with repeated contact between researcher and participant greatly multiplies the 'emotional labour' that the research demands of all those involved in the research (Sanders, 2008), but arguably this additional labour is well rewarded in the strengthened and detailed research encounters that are often an outcome of effective QLR. Investing research energies in sustaining the engagement with participants thus not only helped deliver a comparatively high rate of sample maintenance but also led to deeper and more effective research interactions due to the nature and extent of contact between interview waves.

4.11 Data management and analysis

4.11.1 Data management

In managing and analysing the data generated by this study, verbatim transcripts were first prepared from each interview and carefully stored to comply with data protection and management legislation and protocols. All of the first and some of the second wave of interviews were transcribed by the researcher herself. However, following ongoing shoulder problems the researcher was unable to complete further

transcriptions and so the remainder had to be contracted out to a private agency specialising in transcription for academic purposes. The need to contract out a large segment of the transcription inevitably interrupted the process of immersion with the data, but the researcher sought to overcome this through repeated listening to the interviews alongside reading and re-reading the prepared transcripts. In this process, full and sustained immersion in the data set was prioritised as a vital aspect of the analytical project (Mason, 1996; Ritchie et al., 2003b; Schmidt, 2004).

4.11.2 Data analysis

QLR brings with it real challenges – as well as exciting possibilities – with regard to the analysis of generated data (Henderson et al., 2012; Millar, 2007). As already discussed, time and the temporal become central to both the research strategy and design and to the analytical focus of QLR. In QLR, analysis requires an account of each case over time (diachronic analysis), as well as an exploration of themes emerging from each wave of data generation (synchronic analysis), demanding both within-case and across-case analysis (Corden and Nice, 2006; Thomson, 2007; Thomson and Holland, 2003). Furthermore, in developing empirically grounded explanatory accounts it is also important to consider the relationship and patterns between the different cases across and through time – a demanding prospect which requires both robust and flexible approaches to the analytical process (McLeod and Thomson, 2009).

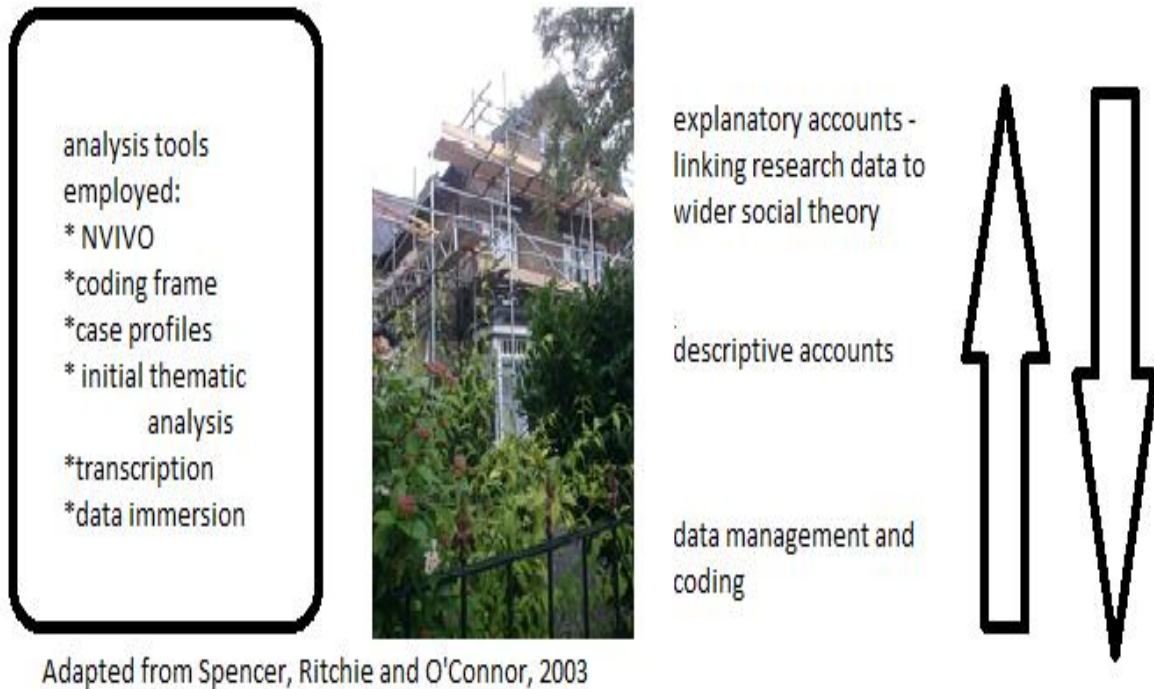
QLR analysis is time intensive and requires a flexible and iterative approach, with emphasis placed on seeking to explore the interactions between time, processes and change in the sampled cases (Holland et al., 2004). The richest qualitative longitudinal analyses will proceed iteratively, given the scope provided by allowing analysis of one interview wave to inform the design and focus of subsequent wave(s). This was the approach taken in this research, with brief thematic analyses developed through immersion with the data after the first and second waves. These thematic analyses provided analytical insight critical in developing the second and third wave interview schedules. This meant themes emerged from the data organically and ensured that lived experiences of welfare reform which the participants themselves identified as particularly pertinent but which, in some cases, the researcher had not focused on, became central to the concerns of the study. For example, in the first wave a number of participants highlighted how they were struggling with a shift in benefit payment frequency from weekly to fortnightly. The researcher was then able to ask the whole sample about changes in payment frequency and their impact in the second and third interviews. This generated rich

data of particular relevance given the government's plans for Universal Credit to be paid monthly (see Chapter 7).

Given that QLR data is generated across time, an iterative approach to data analysis also enables researchers to re-analyse and re-interpret their data at a number of time intervals (Hughes and Emmel, 2012). Revisiting earlier interview waves for a second, third or even fourth time can generate new analytical findings, especially as the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the data is often deepened at each re-analysis, becoming multi-layered by the insight provided by subsequent interviews. In this research, iterative thematic analysis of each interview wave was facilitated by sketching out the central themes to emerge from each interview wave, as well as by developing brief case profiles for each participant that captured some of their central biographical details, alongside key experiences and attitudes towards welfare reform. These case profiles were updated after each wave of interviews and were an invaluable aid to the more detailed analytical stage that followed. In undertaking the diachronic analysis, any evidence of substantive and meaningful change was highlighted, as were key themes from each case's 'interview story'. Having completed all three interview waves, the researcher then developed a broad coding frame with codes emerging from the research questions as well as from the thematic analyses conducted after each interview wave.

The software data management and analysis package, NVIVO, was utilised for coding and analysing the data. Employing NVIVO enabled the researcher to segment her data into manageable thematic 'chunks', which could then be further analysed and interrogated. In building upwards from the data to descriptive, thematic and then explanatory accounts, Spencer et al's (2003) concept of climbing conceptual scaffolding proved helpful to the researcher in operating as a quasi-physical representation of the analytical work in which she was engaged. The researcher climbs upwards from data management and coding, to the creation of descriptive accounts, and then, finally, to explanatory accounts which explore patterns in the generated data, as well as linking research data with wider social science theory (2003). The analysis moved backwards and forwards, up and down the scaffolding, as descriptive and explanatory accounts are developed and re-thought (Blaikie, 2000). As the researcher navigated the analytical conceptual hierarchy, a priority was placed on attempting to stay 'true' to participants' own accounts (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor 2003), and so not abstracting too far from the data itself (for a visual representation of the scaffolding journey see below). In reporting the participants' own words, these are provided as they were spoken, only removing verbal hesitations such as 'like', 'erm' and repeated 'you knows'.

Figure 6 Analysis as conceptual scaffold – analytical tools and the analytical journey (Spencer et al., 2003)



4.11.3 Archiving data

Given the value placed on the participants' own accounts, as well as the clear scope for making data available for secondary analysis, re-use and re-interpretation, the researcher committed from the outset to placing her anonymised interview data in the Leeds Timescapes archive. This is a multi-media archive of qualitative longitudinal datasets from a network of linked projects (see Timescapes, 2015). In many ways, deciding to archive the data was an ethical decision, and one which reflected the stakeholder approach taken, as well as relating to the ethically grounded perspective that if participants were prepared to give up their time to explore these issues, the raw data generated from these encounters should be made available to a wider audience than just the researcher (Neale and Bishop, 2012). Research participants were asked to give separate written consent for the archiving of their interview data (see Appendix Two), and many of them were enthusiastic about the idea that it made their reflections available to a broader academic audience. The Timescapes archive includes strict regulations regarding accessing

and managing stored data (Neale et al., 2012), and the procedures for storing the data were carefully negotiated with the Timescapes archive team.

4.12 Effective dissemination and maximising impact

From the outset of developing the overarching research design, a clear emphasis was placed upon ensuring that the eventual dissemination would prioritise the production of a range of accessible outputs targeted at a variety of audiences and designed to sit alongside and complement the primary research output for the project, this PhD thesis. In QLR, the research participants themselves have a long and sustained engagement with the research and it was thus felt to be of particular importance that some outputs would be both accessible and of interest to the participants themselves and the audiences they wanted to reach in sharing their lived experiences of welfare reform (Hemmerman, 2010).

4.12.1 The Dole Animators Project

To this end, a project to create an accessible output and one over which the research participants would have some ownership was established, an aspect of the overarching commitment to participatory research practices embedded in this study. Working with an animator from Northumbria University, and with funds secured from a National Lottery Awards for All grant and the Higher Education Innovation Fund, research participants took part in a project to design and develop a film which highlighted those findings which they thought were of most importance and interest. The making and dissemination of the film is perhaps best conceptualised as a separate but linked research project, which brought with it particular ethical and methodological dilemmas, discussed elsewhere (Land and Patrick, 2014). The project was conducted between March and October 2013, after the final wave of interviews had been completed and a preliminary analysis attempted. Eight research participants took part in a series of nine workshops with the researcher and animator to decide which aspects of the study to focus on, what animation techniques to employ and how best to publicise and disseminate the film. Although the researcher provided a brief presentation on some of the key findings from the research, the participants themselves decided which themes they felt were most pertinent and also chose the way the film should look and how it should be disseminated. They decided to call themselves the 'Dole Animators', and the group hold the copyright for the film.

The animation itself was done by professional animators, mainly recent graduates from Northumbria University. The finished film was launched online, as well as with

dissemination events in the Houses of Parliament, in the participants' local community and with a 'red carpet' launch in central Leeds. The film attracted widespread national and local media coverage (cf. Jones, 2013; O'Hara, 2013), and some members of the Dole Animators group forewent their anonymity to discuss their experiences both of welfare reform and of being on benefits in the media.

The film has now been viewed more than 11,000 times and the group continue to be invited to talk about the project and to screen the film at various conferences and events. Importantly, the group still meets occasionally, and there is currently a small programme of work ongoing to provide updates on their experiences since the film was made, updates which will be publicised on social media and made available on the Dole Animators website. Members of the group have also continued to do occasional media work, which has included both examples of self-authored pieces in national broadsheet media (Head, 2014), blogs (Patrick and Dole Animators, 2014) as well as appearances on local and national radio and television.

Critically, the Dole Animators project gave those participants who chose to get involved (and all were invited) the opportunity to have significant ownership of one visible output from the research, and the demand for the film emerged from the participants themselves during discussion in a research steering group meeting. The launch events provided a space for participants to disseminate the research findings with those they had identified as an important audience for this research. Those who participated in the Dole Animators project described how they valued the opportunity to present an alternative to the dominant characterisations of out-of-work benefits receipt. With resources, the group were able to 'get organised' (Lister, 2004) and provide a counter to the dominant and stigmatising narrative. At the same time, participants also described the importance of being able to share their own experiences within the group, and the support provided to one another through their shared experiences, empathy and understanding. This was particularly important for those who did not have developed social networks and/or family living close by. Finally, several emphasised the new skills and experiences they gained through the project, with the trip to London particularly exciting; for two of the participants their first trip to the Capital.

4.12.2 Other forms of dissemination

Aside from the Dole Animators project, this research also sought to develop a range of interim findings, and to capitalise on the timeliness and topical nature of the research topic. As a result, the research was disseminated through a range of comment pieces and articles in both local and national newspapers, blogs and

broadcast media appearances (BBC Radio 4, 2012a; Patrick, 2011a; Patrick, 2012c; Patrick, 2013a; Patrick, 2015a; Patrick, 2015b). With regard to more academic outputs, the research has been disseminated at social policy conferences, including the Social Policy Association Annual Conference in Sheffield (2013), the 2015 Journal of Youth Studies Conference and in an article for the Journal of Social Policy (Patrick, 2014b).

In developing a varied and detailed dissemination strategy, emphasis has been placed on seeking to maximise the potential impact from this research. Here, impact has been understood to encompass both conceptual and instrumental impact (Neale and Morton, 2012), as well as the scope for capacity building from the research. In terms of capacity building impact, the researcher prioritised opportunities for sharing her methodological experiences, leading a workshop in ethical dilemmas in QLR as part of an ESRC White Rose Doctoral Training Centre event as well as publishing articles and book chapters on sustaining contact with participants, the ethical challenges inherent in working across time and the particular methodological approach adopted in the film project (Land and Patrick, 2014; Patrick, 2012b; Patrick, 2012d).

When discussing their motivations for their continued engagement in the research, participants frequently spoke of the importance of grasping any opportunity to try to share their own experiences of welfare reform, experiences which they felt were all too often silent in both media and government narratives. While the researcher evidently had to manage – and often deflate – their expectations of the likely research impact, the participants' own motivations certainly acted as an additional ethical drive to seek to maximise impact, with a particular emphasis around developing chains of dissemination which are valued by and have meaning for the research participants themselves (Hemmerman, 2010).

Effective non-academic dissemination was conceptualised as a vital element in both keeping research participants engaged in the study and ensuring that the research maximised its potential impact. In newspaper articles which reported on the research, participants' own words always featured prominently. Participants were given copies of the articles, and often expressed surprise and pleasure that their experiences were reaching a wider audience. Overall, the dissemination strategy to date has proved largely effective, though monitoring impact will require an ongoing engagement with the reach of the study's future outputs. It is hoped that both instrumental and conceptual impact will have been achieved and early signals are promising in this regard.

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the research strategy pursued in exploring the lived experiences of welfare reform. The decision to proceed longitudinally has been discussed, as have the approaches taken to sampling, recruitment, methodological choices, data management and analysis, dissemination and impact. There are three primary methodological reflections from having undertaken this research study over the past five years. Firstly, it is vital to incorporate the ethical plane into every aspect of the research process, rather than thinking of ethical decisions as a discrete stage of the research, overseen and regulated by ethical frameworks and simply requiring an ethical committee's stamp of approval. Rather, good ethical decision making needs to be situated and processual, conceptualised as an ongoing element of the research (Neale and Hanna, 2012; Wiles, 2013). Secondly, this research has hopefully illustrated QLR's potential in exploring social policy interventions, particularly where these are focused around efforts to change individuals' behaviour. QLR is an invaluable methodological approach, given its scope to contrast anticipated behavioural change from policy interventions and the real world responses from individuals directly affected over time. Thirdly, there is real scope in working in partnership with gatekeepers in seeking to recruit relatively 'hard to reach' populations, with particular scope in working with comprehensive gatekeepers who often have strong links with their service user populations. Both recruiting and sustaining contact with the research participants was only made possible because of the input and joint working with the two gatekeepers, illustrating the importance of their involvement in the study. Hopefully, the richness of the data generated and reported in the empirical chapters below demonstrates the effectiveness of the methodological approach pursued. It is to the first of five empirical chapters that this thesis now turns, with a consideration of what 'getting by' on benefits during times of welfare reform involves.

Chapter 5 ‘Languishing on welfare’? Biographies, everyday realities and imagined futures of out-of-work benefit claimants

5.1 Introduction

The government repeatedly characterises out-of-work benefit claimants as a homogeneous group of passive and inactive individuals trapped in a “cycle of dependency” (Cameron, 2014c), where they can be found “languishing on welfare” (Duncan Smith, 2014d) (see Chapter 3). Their supposed passivity is highlighted, with politicians frequently describing claimants’ curtains as closed during the day, an easy and attractive symbol of their non-work, and one contrasted with the responsible, hardworking behaviour of those busy earning a wage (cf. Cameron, 2012a; Osborne, 2012). This dominant citizenship narrative implies that many benefit claimants are behaving irresponsibly, with benefit reliance unproblematically equated with non-work and non-contributing behaviours. Claimants are then seen to require the threat of conditions and sanctions to be activated into paid employment, with welfare-to-work construed as a policy tool of social and citizenship inclusion (Patrick, 2013b; Wright, 2015) (see Chapter 3). However, it is not clear how far and whether this citizenship narrative actually coincides with day-to-day realities.

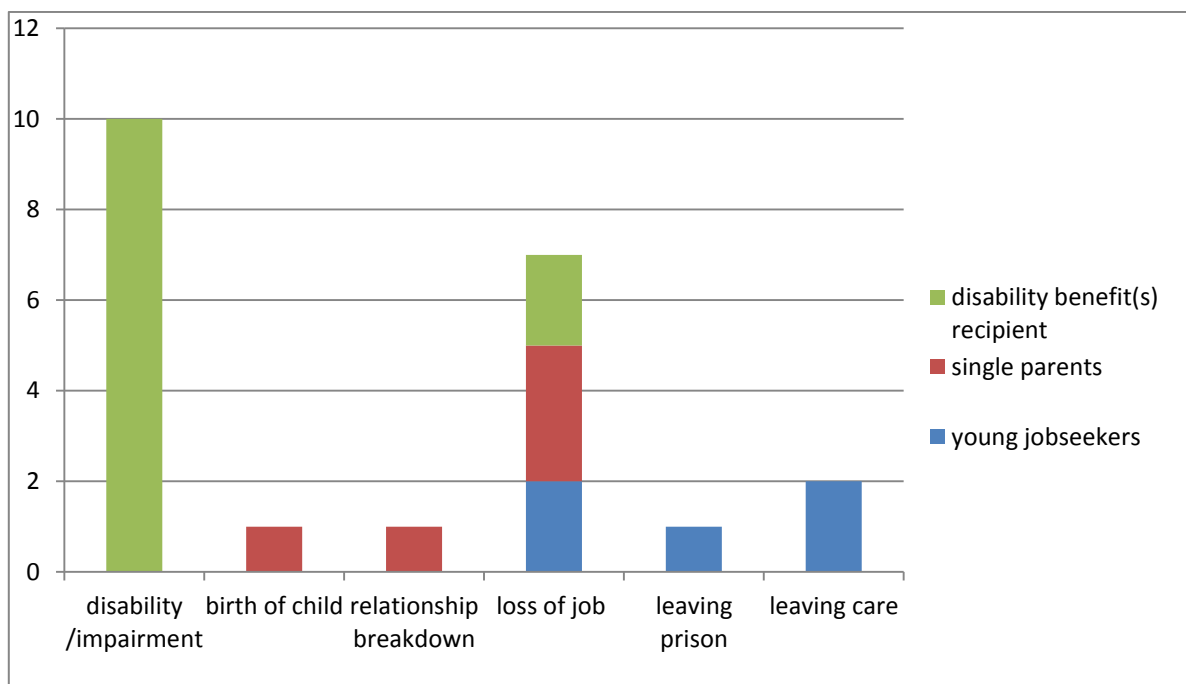
This chapter outlines the biographies, lived realities and imagined futures of a small group of out-of-work benefit claimants living in Leeds. It explores the reasons for the claimants’ current benefit reliance, as well as contextualising their past lives, before setting out in some detail the lived realities of their struggle to ‘get by’ on benefits during times of welfare reform. This is followed by an exploration of the various forms of contribution in which so many of the participants were engaged. The aspirations and imagined futures of the participants are then discussed, with a consideration of how and in what ways they talked about the future. This chapter starts the attempt to detail citizenship realities for those who currently rely on benefits for all, or most of, their income, with a contrast drawn between the experiences of citizenship from below and the dominant citizenship narratives imposed from above. It provides baseline detail of the situation of the participants at the start of the study, with later chapters (6-9) exploring how their relationships with paid employment, experiences of welfare reform and their own perspectives on the government’s approach changed in the course of the research.

5.2 Biographies of out-of-work benefit claimants

5.2.1 Triggers for current benefits reliance

At the time of their first interview, all 22 participants were reliant on out-of-work benefits (see Appendix Three for brief pen pictures of each participant). A significant number of participants (10) had moved onto benefits due to illnesses and/or impairments although this is closely tied to the over-representation of disabled people in the initial sample, an aspect of the sampling strategy (see Chapter 4). Of the five single parents, only one described the birth of their most recent child as the trigger for their current benefits reliance. Three of the single parents were claiming benefits due to losing a job and one due to relationship breakdown following experiences of domestic violence.

Figure 7 Reasons for current reliance on out-of-work benefits, initial sample (ISMP)



For the five jobseekers, three linked their current benefit reliance to losing a job, while two had never been in employment. A chart outlining the spread of triggers for

participants' benefit reliance at the beginning of the research is provided above. This chart¹ illustrates how structural factors are often dominant in the explanations for reliance on out-of-work benefits, something which is arguably underplayed in the government's own analysis.

In talking about the reasons for their current reliance on benefits, in almost all cases participants spoke of it being unchosen and unwelcome, but experienced as inevitable (see Chapter 8). Amongst the disabled participants, this narrative was particularly strong. Isobella explained how she had been enjoying paid work, and life, when she suddenly became ill:

Six months after I had retrained and got myself a small business running [as an aromatherapist]...and I was really looking forward and enjoying what I was doing, when I started having a lot of problems with hands and feet, and I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis which was a bugger because it meant that everything had to stop. (DBC, wave one interview (W1))

For the disabled participants for whom a sudden onset or worsening of illness led to their reliance on benefits, the point of ill health could be characterised as a 'turning point' (George, 2009), which had multiple - mainly negative - repercussions on their lives.

By contrast, for some of the younger participants in the study, benefits reliance had been a permanent feature of their (relatively short) adult life. Sam explained how she had been put on benefits when she formally left care at the age of 18:

It's from when I left sixth form...it was someone from pathway planning that helped put me onto income support. (YJS, W1)

There was also evidence of people moving on and off benefits, as characterised by the low-pay, no pay cycle (Shildrick et al., 2010) (see Chapter 6). Rosie explained:

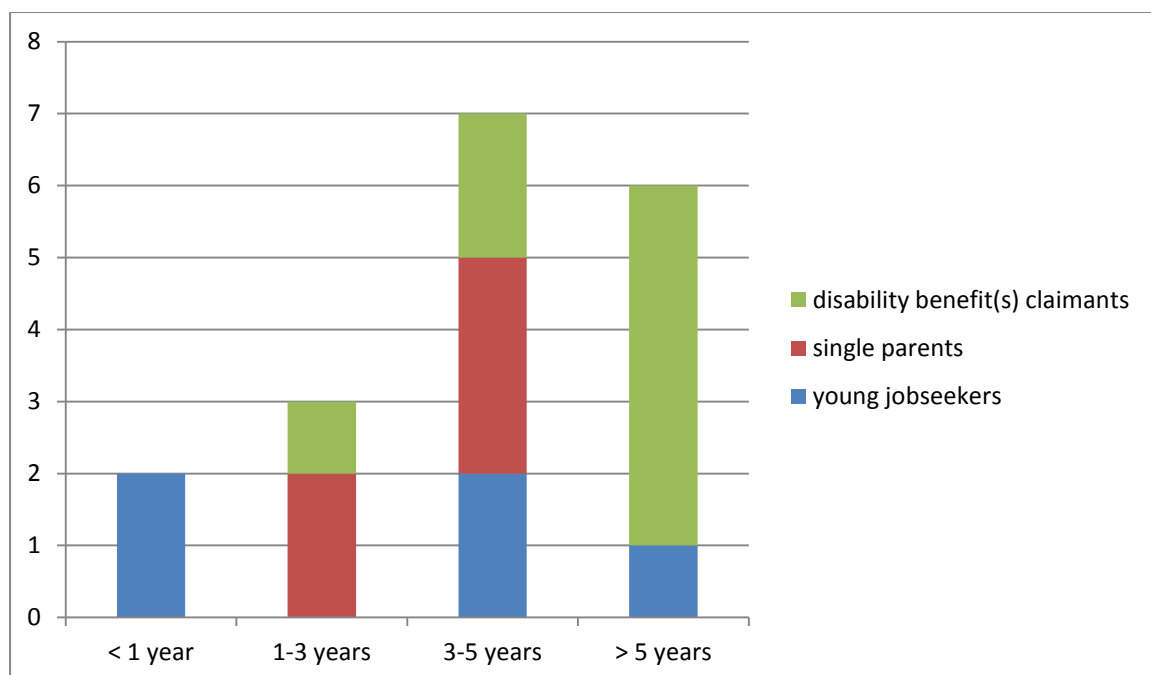
I've had a few jobs since [my son] were born. I've been on and off [benefits] since he were born. (Single Parent (SP), W1)

¹ Whilst some of the following charts and tables illustrate the breakdown of the sample in terms of benefit claiming category, this does not form part of the detailed analysis of the thesis and is instead provided for illustrative purposes.

5.2.2 Complex lives, difficult histories

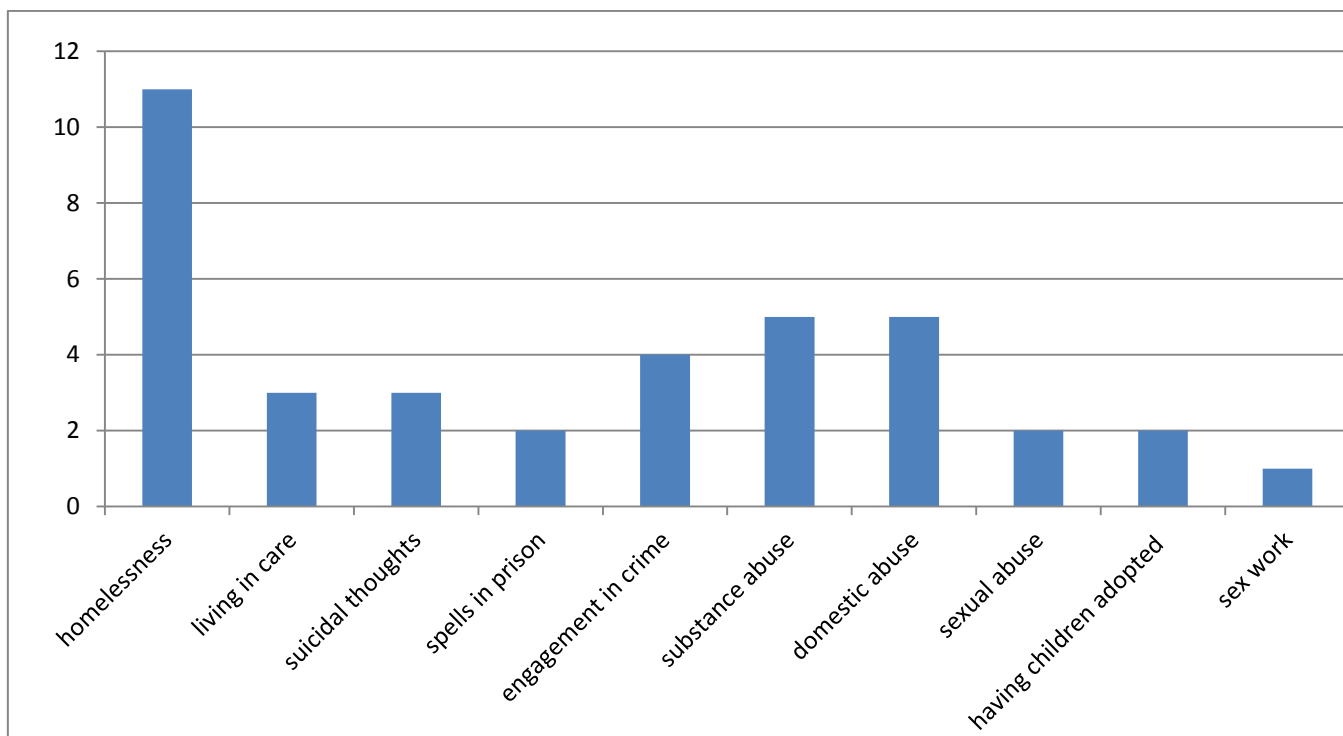
For many of the participants, their reliance on benefits was not only an aspect of their current lives but of their longer life histories, with 10 of the initial sample having been on out-of-work benefits for more than five years (see chart below). Of those who had been on benefits for more than three years, the large majority (11 of 17) were on disability related benefits.

Figure 8 How long been on out-of-work benefits at time of first interview - ISMP



Participants' past biographies often featured difficult histories and traumatic life events, many of which continued to affect and impact upon their current lives and imagined futures. Within the initial sample, there were experiences of homelessness, living in care, alcohol and substance abuse, prostitution, domestic and sexual abuse, prison/crime and having children adopted. The commonality of these experiences – as reported in the interviews – is summarised in the chart below. It should be noted that this is based on self-reported experiences and, given that these life histories were not the interviews' primary focus, the chart may not include the full range of participants' experiences.

Figure 9: Previous experiences - ISMP



For many participants, their difficult pasts affected their ability to live in the present, and also impacted upon their mental health. Now in her late 50s, Cath had experienced a very difficult childhood which included physical and sexual abuse, as well as persistent poverty. Cath explained how this difficult past affected her present life:

They tell you it's post-traumatic stress... I'm thinking, isn't it amazing how you can go through your life, you know it's happened to you, 'cause you were there, but you don't feel anything and then when you're 50, it comes up, kicks you up the bum, and renders you a shrivelled up mess. (Disability Benefit(s) Claimant (DBC), W1)

Like Cath, Adrian emphasised how events in his childhood had significantly impacted upon him:

My birth mum left me when I was a baby and that's when the problem really started and I got told when I were nine [that my mum wasn't my real mum], and ever since then it's just been different. (W1)

Following his difficult early years, Adrian became heavily involved in crime:

I were about 11, I stole a pair of car keys. But that weren't major. My major crimes started when I were about 13...I was a bit stupid when I were younger...In and out of prison... (Young Jobseeker (YJS) W1)

Adrian spent some of his teenage years in care, and also had a number of episodes of homelessness, including a period of rough sleeping. Experiences of homelessness, and of multiple temporary addresses, were very common amongst participants, and had often caused particular distress. Sophie, a single parent with three young children, had recently moved into a stable home, after having lived in 33 addresses in three years. James had experienced street homelessness shortly before the time of the first interview:

[I was] living on the streets, staying at friends' houses, going to [hostels] just here, there and everywhere. Completely unstable. It were horrible. (YJS, W1)

Perhaps hinting at the various and complex needs of many of the participants in this research, 14 of the 22 participants were receiving some form of formal support at the time of the first interview. This included interventions focused around health, housing and substance misuse needs, targeted assistance for care leavers, and support for survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse. Overall then, many of the participants' past lives could be characterised as difficult and complex, with these histories shaping and constraining their present lives, and their capacity to manage and cope on a day-to-day basis.

5.2.3 Benefits and poverty

Speaking to out-of-work benefit claimants about their day-to-day lives inevitably entails an engagement with experiences of poverty (see Chapters 1&8). In this study, reliance on benefits coincided with living in poverty for the large majority of the sample (19 of the 22 participants initially interviewed). Indeed, most of the participants (14 of the 22) were living in 'persistent poverty' (Smith and Middleton, 2007) and could be described as either 'recurrently poor' or 'permanently poor' (Shildrick, 2012). Even those who did leave benefits in the course of the study and found employment were unable to escape poverty (see Chapter 6). Previous research has noted the debilitating cumulative effects of experiencing poverty over a long period of time (Alcock, 2006), and there is no doubt that this was evident for many of the sample. In noting the 'democratisation' and 'temporalisation' of poverty, Beck (1992) argues that poverty is a phase in someone's life rather than a permanent state, or a separate class of people. Countering this, for the participants in this study poverty had the characteristics of a semi-permanent state, albeit one which they still hoped to escape in the future.

Of the whole sample, only five spoke of a past that did not feature poverty and constant struggle. James reflected on how different things had been for him and his daughter when he was in employment:

When I were working, me and Sally used to go to ...[stately home], we'd go to Doncaster Dome, we'd go to the seaside, we'd do all sorts. (YJS, W1)

James explicitly contrasted his previous working life with his current reliance on benefits, something which also featured in the account of Beckie, an older disabled woman who had not worked for many years:

I have worked in my life so I know what it is to own... I have owned my own home and been able to say "well, we'll do this, we'll do that". There's none of that [on benefits]... (W1)

Those who had experienced persistent poverty repeatedly highlighted the bleak reality they faced:

You only get so much money a month just to live on and once you've paid for your bills and your food and bus fares and stuff you haven't got much money to live on. I don't ever go out...I just stay at home on my own. (Karen, SP, W1)

Disgusting. I hate it. Scrimping and saving. It's horrible. (Sophie, SP, wave two interview (W2))

Most of the sample spoke of how relying on out-of-work benefits demanded creative efforts to manage with very limited financial resources. It is critical to explore what this 'managing' involves and requires of individuals, and to consider how far this fits in with dominant narratives of 'passive' out-of-work claimants.

5.3 'Getting by' on benefits

In their discussion of the agency of people living in poverty, Leisering and Leibfried make a distinction between 'coping' with the conditions of poverty and actually trying to 'change' them (1999). This is a categorisation which can also be seen in Lister's (2004) exploration of poverty and agency (see Chapter 1). In this study, the work and efforts involved in 'coping' or what Lister (2004) describes as 'getting by' was a dominant theme, with participants variously displaying ingenuity and resourcefulness in their efforts to manage on what they received in out-of-work benefits.

5.3.1 Hard choices & going without

Managing on benefits frequently entailed hard choices as available money was often insufficient to purchase everything an individual and/or their household required.

Cath had to take a break from paying her gas and electricity bills for a fortnight when she needed new underwear, while James explained:

It's scary because obviously there's so much to do and you haven't got a right lot of money to do it with, so you've got to prioritise what comes first. Then sometimes it can be them shoes on her feet can last another weekend but that food in the kitchen won't, so the food comes before the shoes, you know what I mean? (YJS, W1)

Hard choices were linked to what Karen called 'constantly juggling' (W2), a never ending battle to stretch limited funds to meet basic needs and having to choose between competing necessities. Closely connected with having to make difficult decisions was the necessity of simply 'doing without', particularly so that children could have what they needed. Two of the single mothers in the study spoke of foregoing meals so that their children would have enough to eat, while others described having to do without basic items such as a washing machine or proper heating:

I go without my meals sometimes. I have to save meals for me kids. So I'll have, like a slice of toast and they'll have a full meal. And if they don't eat something, if they haven't picked at it, I'll eat theirs... (Chloe, SP, wave three interview (W3))

Having to make hard choices, and budgetary sacrifices or simply 'going without' are recurrent themes in other studies of people living in poverty (Beresford et al., 1999; Hickman et al., 2014; Lister et al., 2014; Lister, 2004; Pemberton et al., 2014; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Cath explained what 'getting by' entailed when her money had run out:

I have tea with sour milk and I do eat bread that's mouldy. But it's only like for two days before I get paid so I'm all right. (DBC, W1)

Food poverty was a recurring issue, and several of the sample had relied on food banks in the past, a finding which chimes with the growing reliance on food banks across Britain (Field et al., 2014; Lambie-Mumford, 2013; Perry et al., 2014) (see Chapter 3). Participants frequently spoke about how 'getting by' entailed doing without 'luxuries', which ranged from the aspiration of many to one day go on holiday

to more modest luxuries, such as being able to buy the food they wanted and take their children swimming:

You're not able to buy a loaf of Warburton's. You've got to get a cheap loaf of bread. You can't afford to get 'owt nice or luxury – you haven't got a choice. (James, YJS, W1)

We don't get no luxuries... (Chloe, SP, W1)

I can't ever go and do a nice [supermarket] shop where I feel comfortable putting stuff in the trolley – I'm always watching what I'm putting in, do you know counting it up in my head. I wish I could just go and do a nice shop... (Rosie, SP, W1).

My kids have never had a holiday. Never. (Sophie, SP, W1)

Participants frequently mentioned being unable to afford to go on holiday, with the absence of holidays arguably a signifier of what living in financial hardship entails, and how it impacts upon and constrains family life (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013). Having to go without, and not being able to give children the things they wanted and often needed, was a cause of guilt for the parents in the study, reinforcing the findings of other research into the experiences of parents living in poverty (Ridge, 2009).

James described how he tried to protect his daughter from the consequences of his poverty:

I like to have £10 or something... so if we're going to park or whatever and she says: "Dad, can I get an ice cream?", I can say; "yes, you can love"....Just nice little things. Cos I don't like to tell her no. And it's not her fault why I'm in this predicament and she didn't ask to be here. I brought her here so it's my responsibility to look after her, whether...I've got it or not. (YJS, W1)

James explained in a later interview how not being able to treat his daughter impacted upon how he felt about himself:

It makes me feel down as shit, it's horrible. (W3)

In James' narrative, there is an emphasis on his responsibility as a parent and how his poverty undermined his ability to fulfil these responsibilities, something also highlighted by Rosie in describing how she struggled with not being able to afford to take her son out:

Jay has been asking me for the past three days if we can go swimming. And I can't even afford to go swimming with him...It's getting the bus, he'll probably

want a chocolate bar... It's hard. I know sometime it's only a fiver to go but it's not. It's bus fare and other stuff. It's just expensive, even just to go swimming. Even just to go to the park, it's a bus. Everything seems to be about money. The responsibility that he gets fed, he gets washed, he gets clothed, you know, that's all there...But the stuff that I'd like to do with him, there's a big stop on it and that upsets me sometimes. (SP, W1)

Sophie described how her poverty made it more difficult to be able to afford fresh food for her children, describing this as one way in which being on benefits made it more difficult to meet what she saw as her responsibilities to her children:

They go on about children that are obese...Well, the bit of benefits that you do get once you've paid out on your bills and that lot you might have 40 quid left. What else do you buy? You can't go and buy all fresh stuff and meat and stuff like that. It is more freezer stuff than 'owt, to last you. (SP, W1)

There was a clear relationship between the struggle to 'get by' and the difficult choices that entailed, and a resultant exclusion whereby participants felt unable or unwilling to participate in social everyday activities due to their poverty and lack of income. As the Child Poverty Action Group has said: 'at its heart, poverty is about exclusion from social participation' (2001, p.29). Chloe felt unable to answer her landline telephone, as she was fearful that any phone call would be a demand for a debt that she was unable to settle. Cath explained how she had stopped going on daytrips organised by her housing association as she had to bring a packed lunch to save money, but this left her feeling excluded, given that the other tenants ate in cafes. Cath also chose not to attend various support groups and activities as she felt that the cost of a coffee in the cafes and museums where they met was prohibitive:

I know I bang on about money but, with meeting in a place where a cup of tea's £1.75, I want a hundred tea bags and two pints of milk for that (DBC, W1).

James described how he felt unable to participate in family events due to his lack of money:

That's [the] worse part about it, is when there's summat going on and you can't involve yourself in it because you can't afford to do it. It was me mum's birthday last week, and all my family were going out and I couldn't afford to go. It is a big kick in the teeth, stuff like that. (YJS, W3)

Evidence of the exclusion of people living in poverty from many of the day-to-day activities and practices that most of the population take for granted illustrates how

those in poverty experience and have to live with citizenship exclusion (Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2004). It also illustrates the extent to which current social welfare provisions do not provide sufficient financial support to enable people to experience an 'equality of status' with their fellow citizens, undermining the potential for social citizenship rights to have more inclusive outcomes.

5.3.2 The work which 'getting by' involves

The work involved in managing on benefits was often time intensive, including activities such as hand washing clothes, collecting and selling scrap to try and make a few pounds, and going to several shops to try to make sure you paid the lowest price possible for your day-to-day essentials. Much has been written (cf. Burchardt, 2008; Pemberton et al., 2014; Ridge, 2009) about the time expended by people living in poverty to search out bargains and low cost items, and this was certainly a common activity among the research sample. Cath spoke about going to a number of shops in her effort to get the best deal, as well as shopping almost daily in order to take advantage of supermarkets' reduced shelves of food fast approaching its use-by date. As well as being time intensive, 'getting by' often required considerable ingenuity in trying to find creative solutions to making limited financial resources last as long as possible. Examples included parents asking friends to have their children for tea when the money had run out, and participants using electric blankets rather than properly heating their bedroom(s). There were also incidences reported of resorting to crime in an effort to 'get by', most commonly by shoplifting for basic essentials when these could not be bought with existing funds:

A few week ago I only had six or eight pounds...I were in Asda just getting a couple of bits for the weekend for when Sally [daughter] come, and I spoke to her on the phone and she said "dad, oh will you get me some cheese?" But cheese is like, it can be like £2 a block and that, so I pinched it because I thought she wanted it but I couldn't afford to buy it. Imagine going to prison for a block of cheese? It would be stupid, wouldn't it [laughs]. (James, YJS, W1)

Chloe described shoplifting clothes for herself and her children:

This is going to sound really bad but sometimes, for my kids' clothes or even for myself, I actually steal them and I got caught a few week ago stealing but that's the only way I can see to get the things...I want for my kids. And that's just general things like – because they grow too quick – or like Sam now his shoes are talking to him but I can't afford to buy him no shoes until I get my big money in another two weeks.

It's embarrassing when you have to steal to get the things that you need because you haven't got enough money because you need your shopping and your gas and your electric... (SP, W1)

While all of the participants in the study described 'getting by' on benefits as a struggle, those who were on disability benefits, and particularly those who received Disability Living Allowance (DLA), were the most likely to say that they could just about manage. Critically, the extra income from DLA often gave them an (admittedly very small) financial cushion, particularly when contrasted with the efforts of those trying to 'get by' on JSA, IS or ESA alone. This finding is pertinent, given the government's decision to replace DLA with Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) and cut expenditure on this new benefit by 20% (DWP, 2010b). This reform could have particularly adverse consequences for those who have previously received DLA, but are judged ineligible for PIPs and so see their income reduce significantly.

The active work involved in 'getting by' on benefits is a pertinent challenge to notions of the passive, inactive out-of-work benefits claimant, a clear example of the mismatch between citizenship from above and below. At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge that participants did sometimes describe their benefit reliance, and day-to-day lives, in terms of inactivity, and even boredom, something highlighted in other research with out-of-work benefit claimants (McCollum, 2011; Sainsbury and Davidson, 2006). This was flagged up by James, who highlighted how being without a job made his efforts to manage his alcohol issues more difficult:

I'm bored at the minute... when I'm sat about I seem to drink more...and it's running my bills up and stuff just sat in the house. It's sheer boredom, just sat about, doing nowt. (YJS, W2)

Chloe captured the dualism between boredom and hard work which she saw as characterising her own benefit reliance:

It's boring staying at home all the time but it's also hard work. (SP, W1)

The common association between benefits reliance, poverty and boredom is perhaps best understood as one of the negative psychological effects of poverty, which can also include anxiety, depression and a feeling of powerlessness (Beresford et al., 1999).

5.3.3 Debt and financial exclusion

'Getting by' on benefits almost inevitably entails an acceptance of some degree of debt (Harrison, 2013; Hickman et al., 2014; Macmillan, 2003; Walker et al., 2013). Most participants described experiences of debt, with their finances fluctuating over

a very short time frame or cycle, almost always directly tied to the dates of benefit payment(s). Individuals would frequently speak of 'pay day' – when they received their benefit money – as the time to immediately settle all key outgoings before the money ran out. Participants would put money on gas and electric meters, buy food shopping and repay any immediate debts as soon as they received their benefit payment to ensure these essential expenses were met. Rosie explained:

My money - as soon as it's come in - I've got three twenty pound notes...that's all it is...Gas and electric, bills, food, that's it, it's gone. And then I don't get paid for another week. (SP, W1)

After benefit deductions and any other deductions such as rent arrears and criminal fines were taken into account, participants were usually left with very small sums of money to last them until their next payment, and often ran out of money completely:

I've got to sign on tomorrow [Tuesday] so I get paid on Friday and I've got £3.50 in the drawer to last me till then. (James, YJS, W1)

[my money doesn't last], that's the problem. When I get paid tomorrow, that's it, it's all gone. (Robert, YJS, W3).

There are particular financial penalties attached to living in poverty, sometimes described as the 'poverty premium' (Schmuecker, 2013). These include the higher energy costs associated with pre-payment meters, difficulties in accessing affordable credit and short-term budgeting reducing the potential to save money by bulk buying groceries. In describing her constant struggle to manage, Chloe highlighted how she had become trapped in a cycle of debt:

When I get paid, that's it, my money's gone. And then I have to start borrowing again for other things that I need. It's hard... When I first moved in I weren't on a [gas] meter, and so I got a bill through and I couldn't afford to pay it so now they've put me a [pre-payment] meter in and they're taking a lot of money off me [to repay debt]. And when I put a tenner in they give me like £2 gas. I don't get no emergency and they take the rest off. So, I'm forever putting money on gas and I need that for my cooking. (SP, W1)

Participants were managing on very tight margins, with any small change in their financial circumstances – either for the better or worse – having the capacity to have a very significant impact on their lives. Any unplanned for additional expenditure could also have serious consequences, with the potential to tip participants and their families into further debt and financial difficulty. Budgeting and managing small

sums of money in the immediate term was also time intensive, emotionally draining and often distressing.

Individuals were frequently in debt with their utility companies, and often also owed money to banks, credit unions, catalogues, local authorities, housing associations and to the Department for Work and Pensions for crisis and budgeting loans. Benefit deductions due to previous crisis and budgeting loans were particularly common, and these made it even harder for participants to manage on the money they received. Participants were often having as much as £30 a week deducted from their benefits to repay these loans, with individuals unaware that they could actually negotiate to pay these debts back at a much lower rate (see Chapter 4). There were examples of participants relying on selling and pawning during particularly straitened times, and this was often simply accepted as an inevitable characteristic of struggling to manage on out-of-work benefits. Participants also sometimes turned to catalogues and hire purchase, with the pay-weekly or 'rent-to-own' company 'Brighthouse' frequently used to purchase essentials such as fridges, cookers and washing machines.

Despite the very tight financial margins, there were some examples of people managing to save. Susan saved for her daughter's Christmas present by putting aside very small sums each week throughout the entire year. Several of the participants described saving for Christmas, and this relates to other research which has found that Christmas is the most common reason for saving among low-income families (Ben-Galim and Lanning, 2010). It was also – unfortunately – a particularly common cause of further debt. Research shows that low-income families actually tend to do better than wealthier families at budgeting, and that debt problems for those on the lowest incomes are rarely the result of 'bad' financial management or a deficit in individual financial capability (Ben-Galim and Lanning, 2010; Financial Services Authority, 2006). Nonetheless, there remains a persistent sense of failure associated with debt and borrowing. Certainly, most participants in this study did not seem to derive pride from their ability to manage on very small sums of money, and instead often talked about their debts as being symptomatic of their being "bad with money" (Rosie, W1).

5.3.4 Informal chains of borrowing and lending

In managing on very low incomes, there was abundant evidence of family and friends playing vital roles in informal lending and borrowing, and this was if anything more widespread than reliance on formal forms of credit. A number of participants

spoke of borrowing money from their family very frequently (some daily, many weekly or fortnightly):

It's "dad, can you lend me, can you lend me, can you lend me?" [laughs] all the time (Chloe, SP, W1)

Arguably, this short-term lending was critical for many of the participants in enabling them to – just about – 'get by', something which was also found to be particularly important in Hickman et al's (2014) study. While this source of financial support was commonly appreciated, it was often also a source of embarrassment and shame, a theme which also emerged from a study of welfare reform's impact in Scotland (Lister et al., 2014). Hall & Perry (2013) describe the 'relationship premium' of necessary borrowing from friends and family, which centres on the additional relational strain that these chains of borrowing and lending can cause. Reflecting this, Sharon talked about finding such borrowing 'degrading':

I were [borrowing]...money off people and stuff like that and it just got really degrading. One time I had to ask my little brother and...I was so embarrassed to ask him. I had no other way... (DBC, W1)

Chloe explained that her financial reliance on her father put a strain on their relationship. She also struggled with borrowing from friends, but not being able to reciprocate and lend to them in turn:

I don't [lend to other people] and that makes me feel awful. I borrow off me friends and then they want to [borrow] off of me and I can't. It's really horrible. (SP, W1)

Cath and Sharon both explained how borrowing from family was problematic, given the difficulty of paying people back, illustrating how debt and financial struggle can seem part of an endless, escalating cycle:

I usually end up having to [borrow] between ten and thirty pound a week...It gets worse because you [borrow] a tenner and then you've got to pay the tenner back and then...the next week you'll owe twenty quid, and then the next week it's [borrowing] thirty quid so it's like going up and...it's just like a circle so it's quite hard to get out of... (Sharon, DBC, W2)

I could borrow £20 [from my brother] – now to most people £20 is nothing, but £20 means it's going to be two months before Dave gets paid back because I won't be able to pay him more than a fiver without really badly going without. (Cath, DBC, W1)

As well as financial chains of dependency between family members, James and Sophie both described ingenious ways in which they had learnt to manage their budgets by loaning out some of their benefit payment to friends who were also reliant on benefits. As James explained:

I get paid, I like to [lend] to people that get paid the following week. It's like saving, keep safe... I try to [lend] out every pay...If I [lend] it, I know that they won't get paid till the week after so if I want it back they 'aven't got it. (YJS, W2)

In this way, James was able to 'bank' some of his benefit money with a friend in an effort to manage his very limited funds. James felt that if he kept all his money he would not be able to stop himself from spending it, so the informal lending arrangement was a way of self-regulating his behaviour in an effort to 'get by'.

5.3.5 Resilience

The literature on poverty and social exclusion has frequently explored people's capacity for 'resilience' in the face of the everyday struggles which inevitably accompany reliance on benefits for all or most of one's income (Aylott et al., 2012; Harrison, 2013; Lister, 2004). This study found high levels of resilience amongst participants, built upon a variety of skills, knowledge and experiences which helped individuals navigate their day-to-day lives. These skills, which included close financial budgeting, managing relationships with benefit officials, and developing and utilising informal networks and chains of support were rarely sources of pride or esteem for any of the participants. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that the activities associated with benefit reliance are now arguably too heavily laden with negative connotations, linked to the ongoing stigmatisation of those on out-of-work benefits (see Chapters 3&8).

Cath attributed her own resilience to having always had to manage without:

I'm all right. I'm still here...once you've had nothing if there comes a time when you've got nothing again, I think you can handle it better. But if you're brought up with everything, and then you end up with nothing, I think it's harder for them people to handle. (DBC, W1)

The resilience which people sometimes displayed was often combined with a stoicism of sorts, an acceptance that life on benefits was difficult, and there was little one could do about this:

We are finding it [managing on benefits] hard. It's not easy...we have...to persevere don't [we], take it one day at a time...Sometimes we look at [being

on benefits] and be judgemental and sometimes we look at it and think ahh... It's something, we have to take the hard time with the good...It could be better, it could be worse... (Dan, DBC, W1)

You just have to live with it. You know there's nothing you can do. You just have to carry on. There's nothing else you can do. (Susan, SP, W2)

Dan and Susan's acceptance of their lot could perhaps be interpreted as a passive reliance on benefits, but it was in fact generally accompanied by efforts to 'get off' benefits, where this was a realistic option (see Chapter 6).

Alcock (2006) has suggested that people's experiences of poverty may change the longer they experience it. In considering the differing levels of resilience evident within the sample, it was notable that those who had been on benefits the longest had perhaps the most developed and routinised strategies for 'getting by', while those who had spent less time on benefits were still learning and discovering how best to manage. This is not to say that the strategies employed were always effective, or likely to improve individuals' prospects in the long-term. However, they were mechanisms which got individuals from one day to the next, and that was often the only time frame on which individuals could concentrate, given the severity of the challenges and financial insecurity with which they were dealing.

Amy, who had been on benefits for 14 years, explained how she and her husband were trying to manage while they waited for a benefit change to be processed. They had been left with £12 pounds to last them for eleven days:

We can get like a bag of sausages for a £1, just like 20 sausages which will be like five meals between us because we've got till... a week on Wednesday to survive till Steven gets his DLA...We've got one food parcel [which had] a bag of pasta, some soup, some beans, some hot dogs, we already had a tin of new potatoes in the cupboard. And a little bit of pasta and things... We've managed... We've had to sell our brand new TV, we've had to move that one [little TV] out of the bedroom into here, sell our brand new widescreen TV, well do it on buyback at Cash Converters and our playstation and playstation games and everything. And tomorrow we might have to [pawn] mobile phone and other stuff... (DBC, W1)

By contrast, Josh, who was much younger, and had only been on benefits for three years, seemed less confident in knowing how to manage on a very small income:

Since I've been living here I've just racked up debts and debts and debts. I mean it got to about £1000, £2000, and being on benefits is kind of difficult, being able to pay for everything. (YJS, W1)

In comparing these two cases, there is little doubt that Amy was more resilient and confident than Josh and had developed strategies and techniques for managing in particularly financially straitened times.

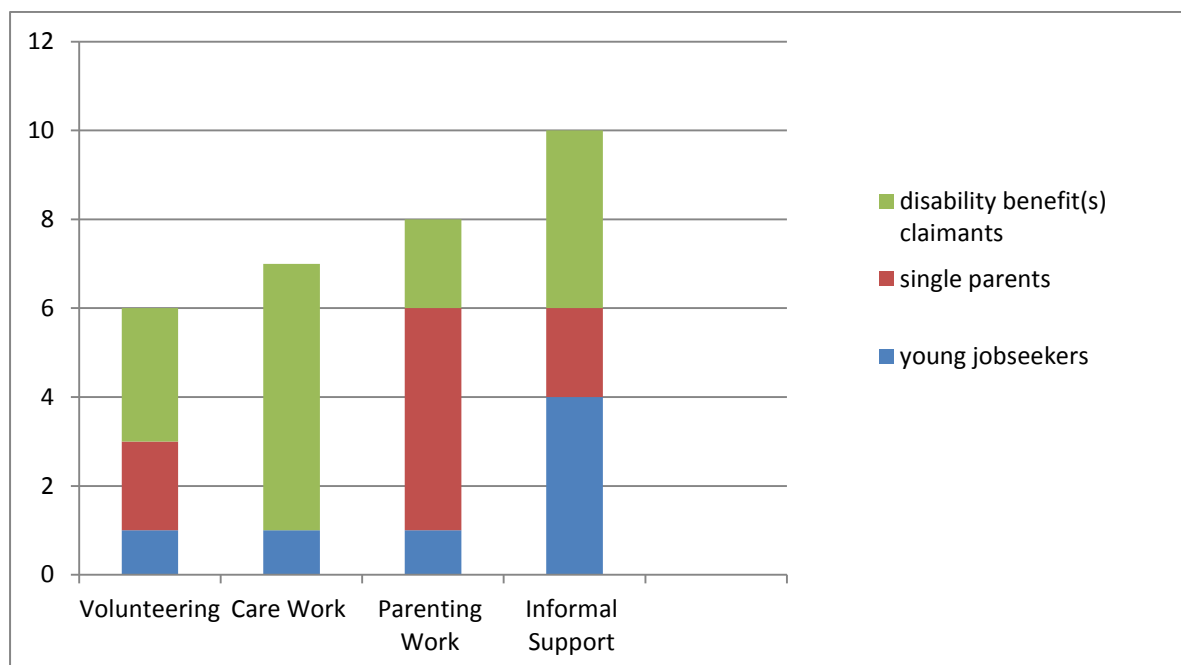
Overall, the efforts involved in 'getting by' on benefits were time intensive, emotionally draining and often associated with feelings of shame and anxiety. As other studies have found (cf. Hickman et al., 2014; Macmillan, 2003; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Walker et al., 2013), 'getting by' entails hard choices, a constant juggling, and simply having to go without (Lister, 2004). The daily demands required of those trying to 'get by', also made planning for the future much more difficult, given that people were often operating to very short and narrow timeframes (see Chapter 7). This research reinforces the findings of other studies that demonstrate the agency, ingenuity and domestic management work which is required in order to live on a low income (Batty and Flint, 2010; Flint, 2010; Ridge, 2009). Although it is important to recognise the agency which 'getting by' and coping inevitably entails, it is important not to romanticise this, particularly given the strain that the 'work' of day-to-day managing involves (Harrison, 2013). There is an allied danger that, in focusing on individuals' agency as they demonstrate an active response to their circumstances, we place too much emphasis on the individual to the neglect of the structural factors which constrain and often indeed cause those living circumstances which demand such a resilient response (Harrison, 2013). Not everyone has the capacity for the same degree of resilience, and there is a danger that in forefronting the resilience of some we tacitly judge and even blame those who do not show the same tenacity and resourcefulness (Harrison, 2013).

5.4 Not working, still contributing

The work which 'getting by' on benefits entails is a pertinent counter to the dominant characterisation of out-of-work benefit claimants as inactive and passive. This characterisation is further undermined in exploring the various forms of socially valuable contribution in which so many of the participants in this study were engaged. While none of the participants were in paid employment at the time of the first interviews, they were often active as volunteers, carers, parents and as givers and receivers of informal forms of support, and these are briefly discussed in turn. The chart below shows the frequency of these forms of contribution across the initial

sample, demonstrating that the provision of informal support was particularly widespread.

Figure 10 Forms of contribution in which participants were engaged - ISMP



5.4.1 Volunteering

Adrian volunteered between five and seven days a week at a local homeless persons' hostel:

I proper love it [volunteering]. You feel satisfaction as well if someone's coming in really hungry. Give them some food, at least they've eaten for the night. (YJS, W1)

For Adrian, this voluntary work was also conceptualised as a stepping stone to employment and he hoped that the experience and skills he was gaining would assist him in his continued hunt for paid employment. Volunteering as an activity that is both distinct from, and yet also a route into, employment could also be seen in the account of Kane, a disability benefits claimant who had a spell volunteering in the same hostel. He felt that there was less pressure attached to volunteering than being in paid work, and also saw it as an opportunity to gain invaluable experience as well as improving his confidence and self-esteem:

It [volunteering] was good for my self-esteem really, doing something. Helping people rather than just sat at home doing nowt. (DBC, W3)

The importance of volunteering for individuals' self-esteem has been found to be significant in other research focused on low-income neighbourhoods (Batty and Flint, 2010). Although participants often attached value to their own volunteering work they described feeling that it went unvalued and unrecognised by wider society. In her efforts to find work, Susan started volunteering at a church listening service as she was keen to get experience as a counsellor:

[I'm] happy that I'm helping someone... [but] it's not even that I get my transport costs or nothing...My time, it should be valued more. (SP, W2)

5.4.2 Care work

Alongside evidence of volunteering amongst the research sample, care work, and, in particular, looking after family members, was also a common experience. Indeed, of the 22 people initially interviewed seven spoke of the care work in which they were engaged. This was rarely described as a source of self-esteem, but instead simply a component of their day-to-day lives which often entailed substantial work but was rarely conceptualised as such. The fact that participants did not speak of their care work in these terms is perhaps connected to the fact that it is rarely recognised or prioritised in government and media discourses. Jim, who himself had serious mental health challenges, spoke about caring for his partner and brother, who both also had mental health issues:

That's [caring's] all I do. I don't get any time apart from it, you know. (DBC, W1)

Beckie described the daily work that caring for her adult daughter involved:

I keep in touch with her on a daily basis; make sure that she's all right. Make sure she's had a bath and eaten... (DBC, W1)

5.4.3 Giving and receiving informal support

As well as caring for family members, there was also frequent evidence of informal support being given to friends, family and neighbours, and again this was often reported as simply part of everyday life. Examples of the provision of informal support included helping decorate friends' homes, raising money to support local food banks and informal assistance with child care. Sophie helped out with child care for friends:

If they [friends] need help, then obviously I'm there. So like my friend up the road, she's been poorly so I've been watching her son... (SP, W3)

The two grandmothers in the study, Beckie and Cath, were both actively involved in their grandchildren's care. Beckie explained how she helped her children out:

I've just been doing my daughter's washing as you can see out on the line. And I've got my little grandson, who's three, tomorrow all day. And then, Friday I've got my little granddaughter, who's four, staying over with me. (DBC, W1)

Having recently moved house, James had been given his mum's old sofa and was going to pass his own sofa onto a neighbour. James and his girlfriend (who was present for the interview) explained:

Girlfriend: We're giving this [sofa] to a neighbour down there...

James: Who's like, been in my position before, you know what I mean?

Girlfriend: Not selling it; we're giving him it him.

James: Letting him have it...because, like I say, I were in same situation before and luckily I can do it. (YJS, W3)

Many participants also described receiving informal support, which was conceptualised as being vital to their ability to 'get by', and often made a decisive difference in their everyday struggle to keep afloat, particularly during times of crisis. JD explained how his neighbours supported him when his wife suddenly died:

If it weren't for them, I don't know what the hell I would have done ...They were feeding me [points to one neighbour], and they were feeding me [point to other neighbour]. (DBC, W1)

Sophie frequently did her clothes washing at a neighbour's, to save on the expense of using a launderette, although she described feeling guilty about relying on her neighbour in this way:

You can't keep putting it on her because she's on benefits, same as me. You know, it's gas, electric and that lot so... I'm like "do us that bag and I'll give you a fiver or something", and she's happy with that so that's all right, but you can't keep putting on your neighbours. It's hard. (SP, W1)

These informal chains and networks of support, with participants both givers and recipients of 'mutual aid' (Oxfam, 2010), were indicative of the 'bonding social capital' of families and friends (Forrest and Kearns, 2001, cited in Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013) on which participants could draw. These socially valuable activities that help to form and bind communities were not conceptualised as anything other than 'what you do', although they were clearly understood as a critical

resource in efforts to 'get by'. Research has shown that there is more mutual aid work carried out in low-income communities than in more affluent communities (Williams, 2005), and this study certainly found a relative abundance of these forms of unpaid and yet critically important exchanges. These exchanges are arguably now more vital than ever, given the ongoing impact of welfare reforms and consequent growing reliance on community networks (Kuper, 2014). It remains to be seen, however, whether the provision of such informal support in low-income communities will itself be threatened due to the processes of welfare reform and the increased pressures these may place on affected households (see Chapter 7).

5.4.4 Parenting

For many of the sample their work as parents was an important source of self-esteem, and this coincides with findings from other studies (Batty and Flint, 2010, Duncan and Edwards, 1999). For the single parents in particular, their parenting was prioritised, with the mothers interviewed frequently speaking of their pride in being a good parent:

Like my mum and dad, I know that they are so proud of Jay [son] because of how I've brought him up, and that's a buzz to me is that. (Rosie, SP, W2)

The single parents in the study commonly described parenting as their primary duty. Chloe prioritised her parenting, which was the one activity she was able to take pride in:

I think I was put on this earth just to be a mum. I think I were. That's probably the only job I'm good at. (SP, W1)

The very hard work that being a single parent entails was also sometimes mentioned, with Susan reflecting on the challenges of being a single parent:

It's a responsibility because it's just me. It's just me for everything: emotional, financial, everything. It's me. It's a big responsibility. (SP, W1)

Although the parents attached value to their parenting roles, they felt that this work went unvalued by wider society, and instead often felt stigmatised (see Chapter 8). This was often a source of anger for the single mothers in this study, but did not prevent them from taking pride in their parenting work. Nor did it stop them from continuing to prioritise their parenting activities, often in the face of opposition and obstruction from agencies associated with the welfare state (see Chapter 6).

What was notable in this study was how many of the participants were actively engaged in forms of contribution – parenting, volunteering care work, informal support – which are all too often under-valued and neglected in government

accounts that continue to forefront paid work alone as the marker of the dutiful citizen (Bailey and Tomlinson, 2012; Lister, 2003). The government's policy focus and emphasis on paid work overshadows and undermines the economic, social and moral value of the various forms of unpaid work and contribution which are undertaken in communities across Britain (Bailey and Tomlinson, 2012; Coote and Lyall, 2013; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2014). Arguably, these forms of contribution not only go unrecognised in government accounts of passive and inactive out-of-work benefit claimants, but are actually sometimes made more difficult to fulfil given the low rates of benefits and the inflexible demands sometimes made of claimants by JCP staff and welfare-to-work programmes (see Chapter 6).

5.5 Aspirations and imagined futures

5.5.1 Aspirations

Having outlined participants' past lives and difficult presents, this section explores their imagined futures, with a discussion of aspirations followed by an outline of how participants' conceptualised and made use of the future. In exploring participants' aspirations, it was remarkable how many of the research participants (15 of the 22) listed getting off benefits as their primary hope for the future. This was a dominant narrative in most of the research participants' accounts:

My aim or my plan is not to be on benefits in a year's time. (Susan, SP, W1)

[my hope for the future is] to get a decent job, that's well provided for. (Robert, YJS, W1)

The centrality of the aspiration to move off benefits and into employment was reflective of the importance the majority of participants placed on paid employment, and the values which they attached to it (see Chapter 6). Interestingly, a number of the participants emphasised their wish to leave benefits permanently, reflecting their negative previous experiences of transitioning on and off benefits, through a low pay, no-pay cycle (see Chapter 6):

Hopefully...I might get a full-time job and stick at it. Then not be on benefits ever again (Amy, DBC, W1).

For some, entering work was something they hoped to achieve in the near future while for others – typically those with serious health issues and disability – it was a longer-term aspiration for a later time when they hoped to be well enough to be able to participate in paid work. This was the case for Tessa, who had a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia. Tessa explained:

Eventually [I hope to] go back to work...Because I've been out of the workplace ten years now so...no one would have me just doing the job I had before... I'd have to do some training. I'd want to go for an office job eventually when I'm well and do some training beforehand. (DBC, W3)

Aside from the common desire to move off benefits, a number of participants also wished to move home, being unhappy with their current accommodation and/or living circumstances:

I'm just waiting, I'm just waiting to move really. Hoping to move, should say. (Sharon, SP, W1).

I don't like this area. I'd like to move. Of course, I'm on the council waiting list, and I'm bidding on that. I'd like to move out of the area. (Susan, SP, W1)

A long-term central aspiration for the parents in the study was around being 'good parents', and being available to provide support to their children. In this respect, Karen's aspirations were fairly typical:

[I want] to get a good job and keep my son as best I can (SP, W1).

This reflected the emphasis the parents placed on their parental responsibilities, which were often prioritised as being particularly important. How far and whether their aspirations were realised in the course of the study is explored in Chapter 9.

A notable and recurrent feature of the content and details of participants' aspirations was a desire to be 'normal' (James, YJS, W3) and to lead a 'normal life', (Chloe, SP, W1). These aspirations included:

Getting up, going to work, coming home and having me tea and a shower and watching telly. I know it sounds sad, but just a little life like that'd be lovely. Have a bit of money in bank where I don't have to worry about things. 'Yeah, all right, we'll get a take-away this weekend' or 'yeah, go and get them shoes that you want'. (James, YJS, W3)

[In the future] I'd like a nice house; I'd like stability, money and just a nice house, that's really all I want. (Chloe, SP, W1)

Get a job, find a girlfriend, settle down really. (Kane, DBC, W3)

As well as these mainstream aspirations, participants frequently expressed a desire for a future life that was secure, stable and without worries; characteristics which they arguably felt to be missing from their present lives. Participants hoped their futures might include:

A stable routine (Chloe, SP, W3)

A steady lifestyle, just a nice, easy life (James, YJS, W1)

A nice life...Peaceful, no stress like this (Adrian, YJS, W1)

Being financially stable (Rosie, SP, W1)

As Kempson concluded in her own study of those living on a low-income almost twenty years ago:

[people on a low income] have aspirations just like others in society: they want a job, a decent home, and an income that is enough to pay the bills with a little spare (1996, p.163).

There are two reflections on the mainstream aspirations of those living on low incomes which are worthy of note. Firstly, while the government and underclass narratives characterise those relying on out-of-work benefits as cut off from the mainstream (Duncan Smith, 2011; Murray, 1984; Prideaux, 2010), with differing values, this study found individuals who share the hopes (and fears) of the majority of the population. They are notable in their 'ordinariness'. The government has frequently suggested an association between income poverty and a poverty of aspiration (BBC, 2010; Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education, 2011), an association which was notably absent in this research. This study reinforces findings from research focused on young people, with both finding that the notion of a 'poverty of aspiration' is a myth (Archer et al., 2014). Secondly, the fact that a number of participants explicitly expressed a future wish to be 'normal', and enjoy an 'ordinary life' is reflective – perhaps – of the extent to which they currently feel 'unordinary' and set apart from the mainstream (see Chapter 8). Their sense and experiences of exclusion is arguably founded in the stigma attached to poverty and non-work and is not rooted in any notable differences in their values or aspirations. Critically, the rhetoric from the government, media and much of 'public discourse' 'others' out-of-work benefit claimants and those living in poverty (Lister, 2004; Lister, 2015a), further embedding and entrenching this marginalisation and exclusion (see Chapter 8).

5.5.2 The future: a resource or something fearful?

While there were commonalities in participants' aspirations, there were notable differences evident in how they approached and considered their imagined futures. Some saw the future as a resource on which they could draw to hope for a better, more positive life, while others conceptualised it mainly as something to fear or something which it was simply not possible to envisage. For those who used the future as a resource, it was sometimes part of their 'emotional-focused coping'

(Folkman et al, 1986 cited in Hamilton, 2011). 'Emotional-focused coping' strategies are centred on reducing emotional stress caused by a difficult situation – in this case the struggle to 'get by' on benefits, as opposed to more practical 'problem-focused coping' strategies which are directed towards finding solutions to the problems at hand (1986). Given that the present was often extremely difficult, it sometimes gave participants comfort to carve out future lives that were different, and did not feature the struggle and difficulties which shaped their current lived realities:

Adrian: I live in the future sometimes in my head, but then when it comes to the future it doesn't exactly come out how you expect it to.

Interviewer: And does that help you cope with the present?

Adrian: Yes, cause I'm happy about what might come in the future... (YJS, W3)

For Adrian, a difficult past and challenging present was – he hoped – to be replaced with a much more positive long-term future. This future was a central part of his own narrative: when asked 'what do you think's important [for me to know] about you?' Adrian responded:

Well, it's where I'm off in life really. Not sure yet (W1)

Like Adrian, James seemed to use the future as a way of coping with a difficult present, and he explained that he sometimes got carried away:

I always think about [the future], Like when I apply for jobs I think me head goes wild wi' meself and I think 'If I get this I'll be able to do that', 'I get carried away wi' meself in 'me little head...I always think of [the] future, what'll 'appen and where I'll be. (YJS, W1)

Some of the participants, however, really struggled to actively engage with their own futures, and this was particularly common for those whose lives were most chaotic and challenging. For example, Chloe explained in all three interviews that she preferred to live day-by-day, and had only vague hopes and aspirations for the future. In the first interview, she described this as a deliberate strategy:

I take one day at a time, see how we go and then think about tomorrow tomorrow. And I think that's the best way to do it. (Chloe, SP, W1)

A number of participants described this shortening in their time horizons:

My weeks are days – it's week by week for me and day by day. (Rosie, SP, W1).

A person told me; 'don't worry about tomorrow, cos tomorrow many never come'. It's just taking each day at a time, that's all you can do nowadays.
(Dan, DBC, W1)

For others, while the future did preoccupy them, it was as something to be feared. Isobella described anxieties about a future which could include her health deteriorating:

I suppose one of the things which I don't want to do is end up in a wheelchair which may be a possibility...So I'm looking at the future and it doesn't look particularly rosy... (DBC, W1).

Cath simply felt unable to see a future, and it was interesting to see how she explicitly linked this to her struggle to manage on benefits, something which ties with the existing research evidence on how poverty can constrain people's ability to conceive of a different future (Ridge, 2009):

I don't have a future. I don't have one. You can't have one on benefits. How could you have a future? You can't save up for a holiday, you just can't do it.
(DBC, W1)

For most of the participants, future occasions which would generally be a source of welcome anticipation – notably birthdays and Christmases – were associated with dread, anxiety and worry, given the extra expenditure they entailed. Participants often conceptualised Christmas and family birthdays as particular flashpoints, when the pressure to buy presents and cook special meals became unmanageable:

...when it comes to Christmas and stuff, that's when you get yer kick in your teeth. Because you know it's coming and you know you can't provide for it. When your kids are expecting and you can't do it. That's the worst part.
(James, YJS, W3)

It's horrible [thinking about Christmas]. I'm not looking forward to Christmas this year at all. I really aren't because I haven't got any money to get anyone anything...But I just don't like the thought of it being Christmas and not [being able to] actually giving them [gifts]. (Sharon, DBC, W2)

This was a recurrent theme in the interviews, with parents particularly struggling with their feelings around Christmases and birthdays when they simply could not afford to treat their children as they would want. The sense in which these participants were unable to take pleasure in planning and looking forward to these annual events hints at the relational and psychological harm caused by their poverty and social exclusion. It is also perhaps another example of the way in which poverty impacts

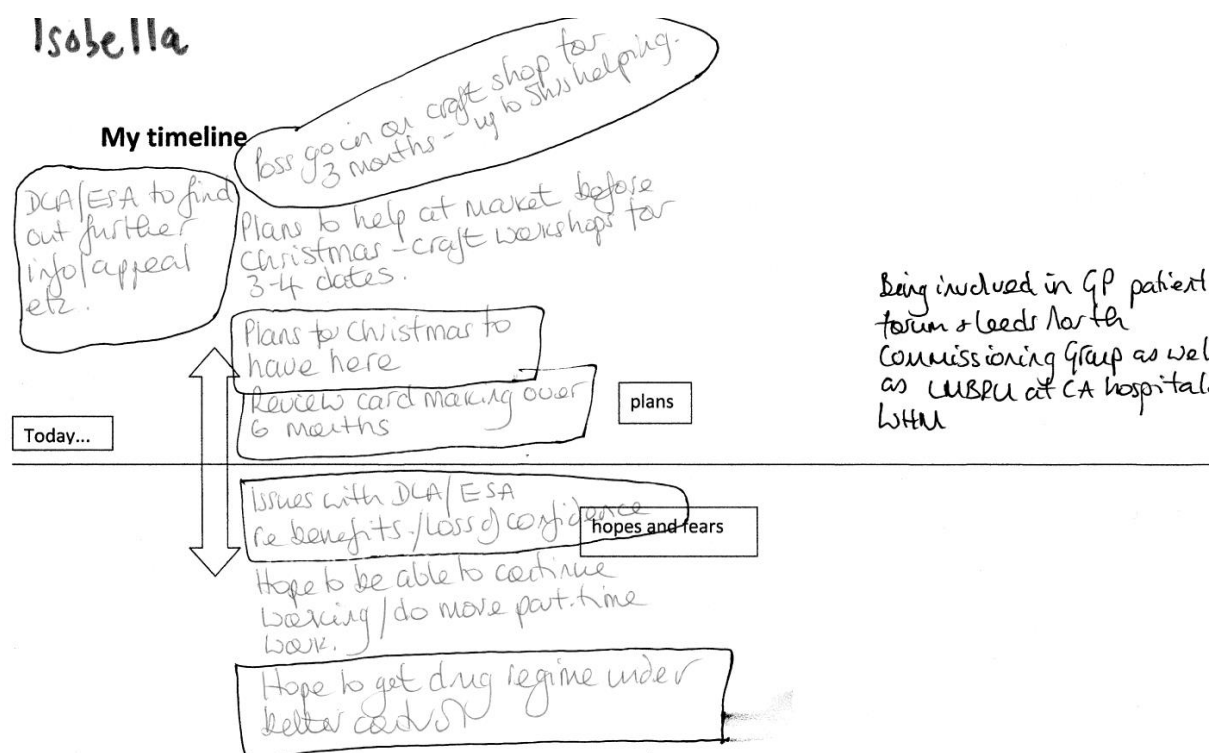
on an individual's citizenship status – while the rest of society is included in a celebration of Christmas, for example, the participants in this study were excluded by their poverty and inability to fully participate in the material consumption which contemporary celebrations of Christmas entail.

The different ways in which people conceptualised their future was particularly apparent in an exercise where participants drew timelines covering the next twelve months. On these timelines, participants were asked to include their plans, hopes and fears, in an effort to explore how and whether people were differentiating between hopes and plans, and the extent of active planning over the medium term. Brannen and Nilson (2007) distinguish between plans, which are generally relatively concrete and achievable, and hopes, which are more abstract. The timelines of Robert and Isobella are reproduced below.

Figure 11 Robert's timeline



Figure 12 Isobella's timeline



There is a clear contrast between the timeline of Robert – which is relatively bare and devoid of detail - with that of Isobella, who has clearly developed active plans covering the next 12 months. Robert’s main plan and hope is to get a job, though he also hopes to learn to drive. However, there is no detail underscoring this, and this is perhaps evidence of the relative absence of active planning, and future-thinking-work in his life. By contrast, Isobella has a variety of relatively concrete plans, which include reflective thinking about her permitted work making and selling gift cards.

The longitudinal sample could be crudely segmented into two categories, ‘active planners’ and ‘day-by-day focused individuals’. The sample was fairly equally divided into these two groups (see below), with disability benefit claimants more likely to be ‘day-to-day focused individuals’ while most of the jobseekers were ‘active planners’.

Table 3 Planning or living day-by-day – longitudinal sample (LSMP)

'active planners'	'day-by-day focused individuals'
Adrian (YYJS)	Cath (DBC)
Isobella (DBC)	Tessa (DBC)
Rosie (SP)	Chloe (SP)
James (YJS)	Karen (SP)
Josh (YJS)	Kane (DBC)
Susan (SP)	Sharon (DBC)
Sophie (SP)	Robert (YJS)
Sam (YJS)	

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the biographies and day-to-day lived realities of a small group of out-of-work benefit claimants. The hard work which 'getting by' on benefits entails has been outlined, alongside a consideration of the financial realities and strategies of those seeking to manage on a very low income. The various forms of socially valuable contribution in which so many of the participants were involved have been detailed, with the chapter further exploring participants' aspirations and relationships with time. The dominant political narrative often contrasts a passivity which supposedly characterises 'welfare dependency' with the active work of responsible citizens busy earning a wage. However, lived realities for individuals reliant on out-of-work are far more complex (and busy) than suggested by David Cameron's caricature of benefit claimants: "sitting on their sofas waiting for their benefit cheques to arrive" (2010d, unpaginated).

Rather than a 'passive' 'inactive' sub-set of our population, those reliant on out-of-work benefits for all or most of their income are typically busy and hard at work, when work is conceptualised more broadly to include the various activities which 'getting by' on benefits demands as well as the forms of contribution in which so many were involved. An exploration of the work associated with being on benefits is also an exploration of the (albeit constrained) agency of those living in poverty. Resilience and resourcefulness are common descriptors of the activities and behaviours of those surviving on low incomes (Aylott et al., 2012; Hickman et al.,

2014), and these characteristics were also notable in this study. While this resilience is to be noted, it also needs to be problematised (Harrison, 2013), given the negative impacts that an ongoing requirement to 'be resilient' can have on individuals over time (Hickman et al., 2014) as well as differentiated capacities for resilience.

The very hard work which 'getting by' on benefits entails and the various forms of socially valuable contribution in which so many of the participants were engaged challenges the assumed 'passivity' of benefit claiming, and is thus a pertinent counter to the dominant government narrative. Indeed, the rhetoric of passivity when contrasted with a reality of hard work is one clear example of a disjuncture between dominant citizenship narratives and lived citizenship realities, which can also be described as a mismatch between citizenship from above and citizenship as it is experienced from below.

This chapter has also detailed the significant negative consequences which out-of-work benefit reliance can have on affected individuals' citizenship status. Given the exclusion from mainstream activities and inability to participate in much of everyday life that such reliance involves, those who are living in these circumstances can be characterised as having an at best precarious and fractured citizenship status. These citizenship consequences hint at the current denial of substantive social citizenship rights to many of our population, with all those who are reliant on out-of-work benefits arguably also denied even Marshall's more minimalist definition of social citizenship rights (1949). Narratives which include having to make significant budgetary sacrifices on a regular basis, managing on a tight and short budgetary time frame, and even feeling compelled to shoplift to buy essentials for their children are arguably reflective of an absence of even the 'modicum of economic security' which Marshall (1950, p 8) saw as the essential basis of social citizenship rights. Aside from this devaluing of social citizenship, a further problem with current citizenship narratives rests with the narrow equation of citizenship duty with engagement in formal paid employment, and it is to a consideration of paid employment which this thesis now turns.

Chapter 6 Relationships between out-of-work benefit receipt, paid employment and back-to-work ‘support’

6.1 Introduction

Paid employment is typically conceptualised as the marker of the dutiful and responsible citizen in Britain today (Dwyer, 2010) (see Chapter 2). Being in paid employment has always been understood as a key responsibility of citizenship, but over the past 35 years there has been an increased policy focus, via welfare conditionality, on ensuring that people are fulfilling this duty (see Chapter 3). This has occurred alongside changes to those expected to participate in paid employment, and so fulfil work-related conditions when out-of-work. This now includes not only those seeking work but much of the wider ‘workless’ or ‘economically inactive’ population, in particular many single parents and disabled people (Patrick, 2013b; Watts et al., 2014) (see Chapter 3). The dominant narrative emphasises the potential for paid employment to create responsible, independent citizens, providing a justification for a policy focus on welfare-to-work (see Chapters 2&3).

This chapter explores research participants’ experiences of, and orientations towards, paid employment over time - their ‘employment journeys’. Following a discussion of participants’ previous working experiences, their aspirations to engage in paid employment are outlined, alongside a consideration of how far and why employment was valued. There is then a detailed exploration of participants’ employment experiences during the study, incorporating discussion of paid employment, informal employment and the work which searching for jobs entails. Finally, this chapter outlines the barriers to paid employment identified by the participants and the employment ‘support’ received from The Work Programme (WP) and Job Centre Plus (JCP). Overall, this chapter aims to ascertain the extent of the (mis)match between the government’s citizenship narrative on paid employment and the lived experiences of out-of-work benefit claimants. In so doing, it continues the attempt to contrast citizenship as imposed from above, with citizenship as experienced from below.

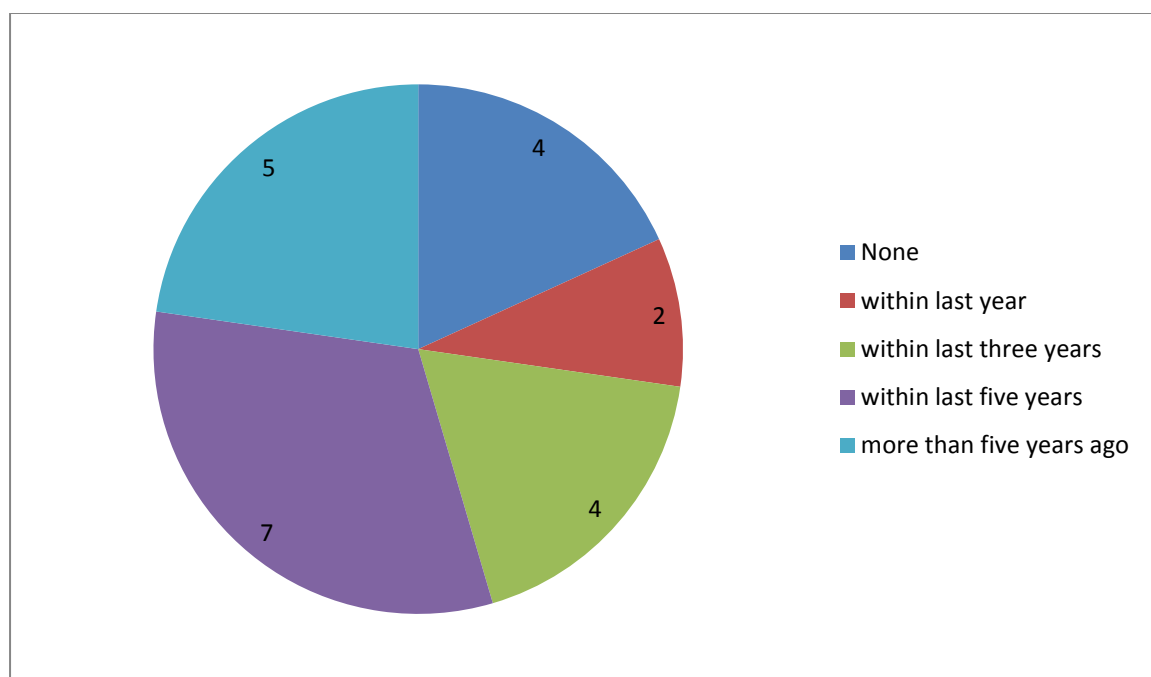
6.2 Orientations to paid employment

6.2.1 Previous employment experiences

Government characterisations frequently portray out-of-work benefit claimants as far removed and detached from the paid labour market, lacking working experiences,

motivations and 'habit' (cf. Cameron, 2012b; Cameron, 2012c; Duncan Smith, 2014a). By contrast, this study found that the majority of participants (18 of the 22 first interviewed) had previous experiences of employment. The pie chart below outlines the spread of past working experiences across the initial sample, and shows that eleven of the sample had been in paid employment within the last five years.

Figure 13 Past experiences of paid employment - ISMP



Typically, people had experience of a variety of roles, generally in low-skilled and low-paid employment. 15 of the 18 who had experienced paid employment described jobs which were in low-paid and insecure sectors such as retail, cleaning, catering and labouring. James' employment history was fairly typical of the sample; he had worked in warehouses, bakeries, gas companies and labouring on building sites. James reflected:

I've been all over [with work]...like a gypsy, yeah [laughs]. (YJS, W1)

Three of the disabled participants followed longitudinally, Cath, Tessa and Isobella, had lengthy working experiences, which were suddenly interrupted when they became ill. These included experiences of better paid and higher status roles which were spoken about with particular pride. Tessa had a history of relatively high level employment, including policy work as a civil servant, while Isobella had been employed as a legal secretary. Isobella explained:

My last job in the past was PA to senior vice president in legal [firm], which was very exciting. (DBC, W1)

Participants were often nostalgic about their working histories, which they compared favourably with their current reliance on benefits:

I loved it [work]. Absolutely loved it...I had a busy work life and I did enjoy it. (Cath, DBC, W1)

I loved it. Ward housekeeper stroke cleaning. I loved it. It were good. It were good meeting people...It made me feel better about myself, working four hours a day. (Chloe, SP, W1)

For disabled people, a narrative of loss emerged, particularly where they feared they might not be able to work again in the future, something which Garthwaite (2013; 2015) has also highlighted in describing disabled people's nostalgia for a lost identity linked to their employment. Tessa explained how she would rather be well and working:

If you asked me and Jim [partner]. We'd rather be well and working. We didn't say ten years ago: "oh, great, I hope I don't have to work again". I had a good job, I were happy. I had good money – more than I get on benefits – a lot more. And then you just, it just hits you... (DBC, W1)

6.2.2 Aspirations to work

While the government describes a 'culture of worklessness' in areas of high economic inactivity (Duncan Smith, 2014a; DWP, 2010b), and suggests that some out-of-work benefit claimants lack the motivation and drive to enter employment, this research found strong orientations towards paid employment amongst most participants. As discussed in Chapter 5, 15 of the 22 participants described 'getting off' (Lister, 2004) benefits, by making a transition from out-of-work benefits into employment, as their primary aspiration for the future when first interviewed and this was a consistent theme in each wave of interviews. Further, this research found that participants' aspirations to find employment endured over time. Even those who experienced frequent rejections and were proving unsuccessful in their job searches retained a strong commitment to finding employment. Susan spent the whole research period seeking employment, without success. She tried a number of different strategies, participating in welfare-to-work courses and volunteering to try and gain additional experience:

And still the jobs are not coming [laughs]. I'm trying and trying, and still I can't get a job. I am trying. (SP, W2)

For Susan, the effort to stay positive and hopeful was evidently a challenge:

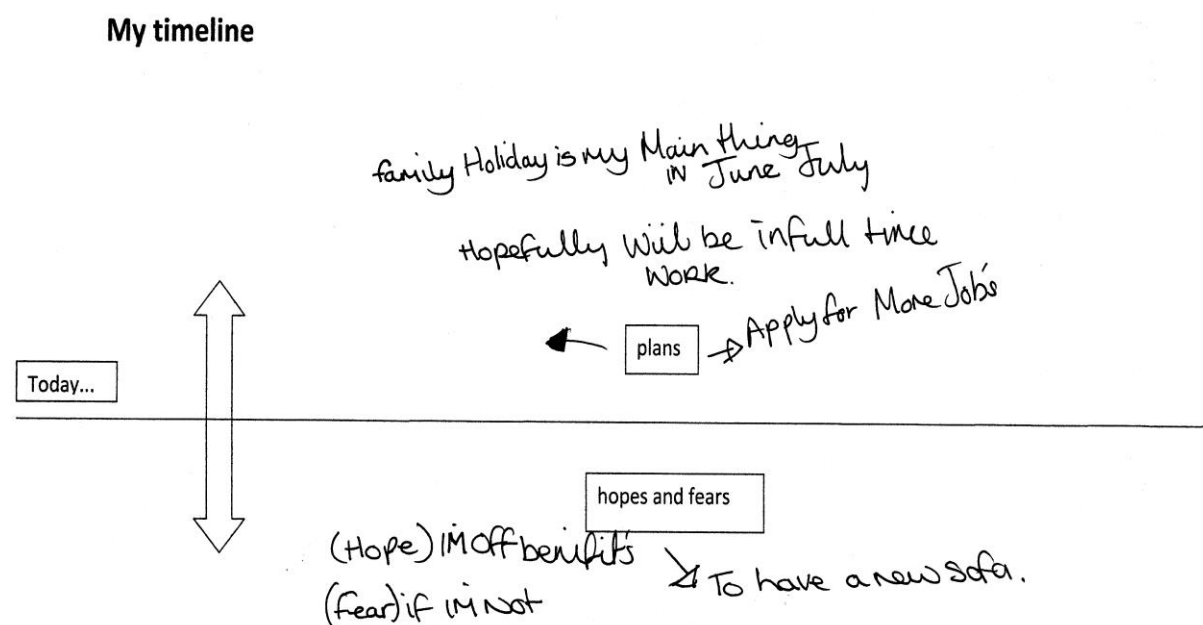
I really hope I will get a job... I dream of it [finding work] and I don't see it happening soon. I don't know. But I'm trying really hard to achieve it. (W2)

In his third interview, James described how important securing employment remained to him, despite repeated setbacks:

[My hopes are] to secure a job... I just want things to be normal. [I want] a career or summat. Summat to work for, summat to look forward to. Instead of, like I say, same old day, same old thing. You're just stuck in a routine; it's same old shit, a different day. (YJS, W3)

When describing their aspirations to work, participants often made an explicit contrast between the life available on benefits and the hoped-for life that might be theirs if they found employment. Indeed, paid employment was often characterised as the antithesis of unemployment, a theme also evident in Shildrick et al's study (2012). For example, in constructing a visual timeline of her hopes and fears for the next twelve months Sophie placed "to get a job" as her primary hope, with her 'fear' that she would "stay on benefits" (SP, W2) (see below).

Figure 14 Sophie's timeline



Notably, there were variations between those who sought a 'good job', and others, such as Sophie, who were simply keen to find any employment at all, reflecting their determination, and sometimes desperation, to find a job:

I'd do owt, cleaning the toilets or anything as long as I knew that we had enough to pay the rent. Then I'm not bothered what kind of work I do...
(Sophie, SP, W1)

Sometimes people's employment orientations changed over time, as in the case of James. At the time of his first interview, James was not actively seeking work (see later discussion) and he described a long-term desire to find employment which would be satisfying and challenging:

You've got a long life. You don't want to be stuck in a job that you don't like for the rest of your life. You want to be doing something you're enjoying.
(YJS, W1)

However, by the third interview, after two years of unemployment and now hard at work seeking employment, James' aspirations had changed:

I'm going for all different things now [like] warehouse...looking at retail. I've even looked at cleaning. (W3)

In this way, James' experiences of unsuccessful job search shaped and changed the nature of his employment aspirations. Variations in the specific type of employment sought could also be seen in contrasting those who had realistic – and arguably achievable - employment goals and others whose aims were very ambitious. There was some pattern here between distance from labour market and nature of employment aspiration(s), with those who had the most recent experiences of employment also likely to have the most realistic employment aspirations. So, for example, Josh, who had recently found seasonal work with Royal Mail, hoped to find further work with the Post Office, with a linked aspiration that this would one day become permanent. By contrast, Sharon, who had not been in paid employment for over three years, and was living with serious impairments throughout the course of the study, discussed aspirations to be a doctor or a nurse, while Adrian, who had almost no paid work experience, wanted to start his own business, or get into film and music production. Adrian reflected on his hopes for the future, explaining that he preferred to call his plans 'ideas':

I have ideas, I don't really have plans – plans never really seem to go to plan....So I call them ideas...and I've got thousands to be honest [laughs]
(YJS, W2).

As we saw in Chapter 5, Adrian saw the future as an important resource in enabling him to imagine a better future life, and cope with a difficult present. However, he faced a number of barriers in turning his 'ideas' into concrete 'plans'; notably his lack of previous work experience and criminal convictions.

While the ambitions of Adrian and Sharon could be described as being so ambitious as to be (perhaps) almost unrealistic, that is – of course – not necessarily the case. Certainly, though, the ways in which participants such as Josh displayed aspirations for a job which was just a little bit more secure and stable than that which they had already, suggested a constraining of their aspirations linked to their experiences of low-paid, low-status employment. The links between participants' employment histories, current experiences and employment aspirations are a pertinent example of how people's present and past lives shape how they think about the future (Adam and Groves, 2007).

6.2.3 Valuing work: beyond monetary gain

The government's agenda prioritises 'making work pay', arguing that people often decide whether or not to work based on a calculation of how much financially better off they will be in employment. However, as Dean argues (2012, p.355), motivations to work are 'far more complex and varied than a simply utility-maximising response to a pecuniary incentive'. For example, Sophie, who briefly found paid employment during the study (see later discussion), explained that her decision to enter paid employment was not motivated by financial factors, as she was no better off in employment:

It's not the money [that's motivating me] (W3).

I would say [working was] about the same [financially] once I'd paid out for my bus fares and that, it were the same as on [benefits] but I were doing something. It were a get up and go...(W3).

While others did speak of the financial rewards of employment, there were also examples of participants placing emphasis on paid employment as a way in which individuals could become included and accepted by mainstream society. Like Sophie (see timeline above), Chloe drew an explicit contrast between being reliant on out-of-work benefits and in employment, suggesting an awareness of the citizenship implications of being out-of-work:

'Cause you already feel worthless [on benefits] anyway. When you go out to work and everything it gives you a sense of ...well-being...you're fitting into the world [laughs], you do what everybody else is doing. But when you're on

social, you just – not like you aren't good enough for any jobs, but...you feel less skilful and less confident. (SP, W3)

Consistent with the findings of other studies (Batty and Flint, 2010; Crisp et al., 2009; Ray et al., 2010), paid employment was conceptualised as being important for self-reliance and independence, and again a contrast was often made here between the independence of employment, and the necessary dependence which was associated with reliance on benefits. Participants described aspirations to find employment and become “self-reliant” (Josh); able to “support myself” (Susan) and “independent” (Chloe, Sam). The government frequently describes the transformative potential of paid employment (cf. Duncan Smith, 2013), and there is no doubt that many of the participants did conceptualise employment as having the scope to significantly change and improve their lives for the better. Participants described the various social and psychological advantages they attached to engagement in paid employment:

It's very important [for me to find a job]. I feel like I'm doing something with my time rather than just sat at home doing nothing or just on a computer...looking for jobs, where I'm out there and I'm getting work, I'm doing something, keeping myself busy, physically and mentally as well. (Josh, YJS, W3)

In terms of the social advantages of employment, Sophie spoke of the possibilities employment provided for some “me-time” (SP, W2), while Karen felt it could “get me out of the house for a bit” (SP, W1).

Isobella, a disabled benefit claimant, was involved in ‘permitted work’ at the time of the first and second interviews, making and selling cards at craft fairs. Showing a clear awareness of the social and psychological advantages of this employment, Isobella explained her concern about how she would manage when she had to give this up, due to worsening health and the emotional pressures associated with the impact of ongoing welfare reforms:

[Permitted work] is occupational therapy because it gets me out. It gets me meeting people and it stops me watching daytime TV. If I didn't have that then the options would be quite bleak really... (W3)

A number of the single parents were partly motivated to enter employment in order to provide strong role models for their children, a finding consistent with previous research into work motivations (Crisp et al., 2009; Millar and Ridge, 2013). Rosie explained:

I do want to work. I don't want him [son] to think that I'm a lazy mum. I'd like him to think, 'oh, my mum's at work'. I don't want him to grow up and think that you can manage in life without a job because you can't... (SP, W1)

For the parents in the study, their decisions around paid employment were typically intertwined with a desire to be a good parent, rather than a narrow rational economic calculation of the financial costs and benefits of entering paid employment. In this way, participants could be seen to be demonstrating the moral rationalities surrounding parenthood identified in the work of Duncan and Edwards (1999). Four of the five single parents conceptualised paid employment as being compatible with good parenting, although each aspired to find paid employment which was sufficiently flexible to enable them to be physically available for their children as and when required.

While most participants emphasised the various benefits of paid employment, there were also some signs of resistance to a dominant focus on paid work as *the* primary activity shaping a productive life. Tessa talked about how she had other priorities to focus on:

Just at the moment I think getting more well is a priority and not work really. I do want to work in the future, that's what keeps me going. (DBC, W2)

She continued:

You can have a purpose in life and not be working. You could have a purpose to get better, to improve your quality of life... (W2)

It was notable that this resistance to paid employment being conceptualised as the primary duty of a responsible adult was most noted amongst the disabled sub-sample. For these participants, employment was arguably not currently a realistic option, and their focus on other responsibilities and values needs to be understood in this context.

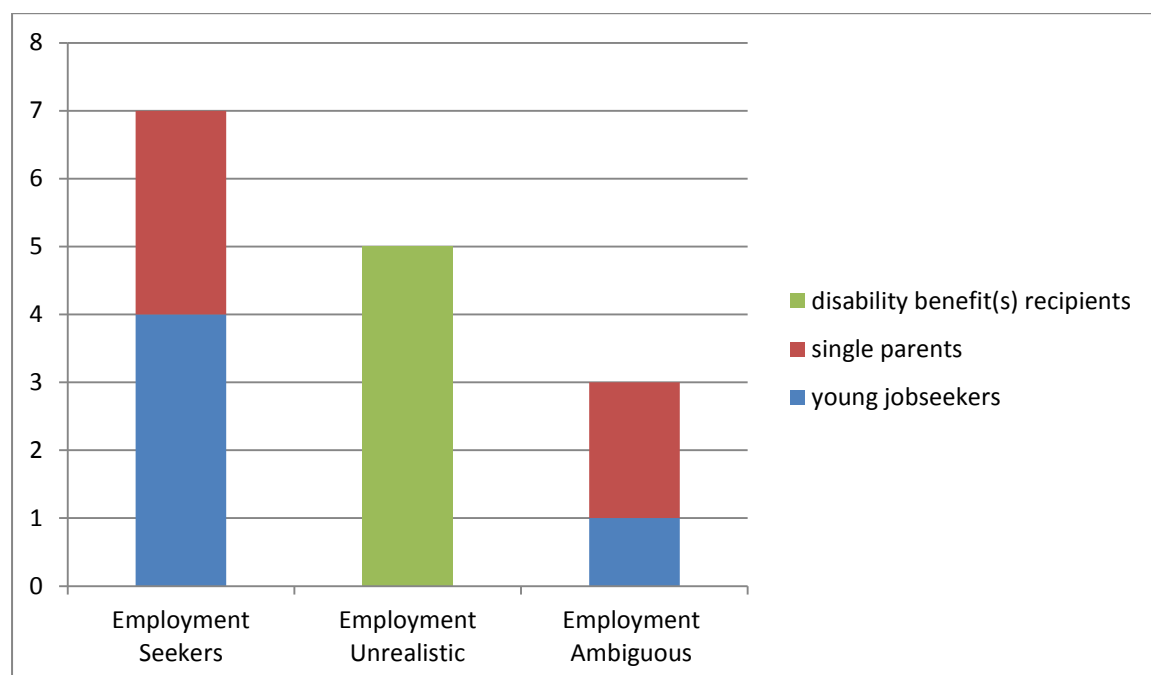
6.2.4 Actively seeking 'work'?

Evidently, it does not necessarily follow that a broad aspiration to enter employment means an individual is actively engaged in seeking 'work'. This study found correlations between orientations towards paid employment and, in particular, active job search activities, and claimant type. All five of the disabled people followed longitudinally felt unable to participate in paid employment at the time of the interviews, due to the extent of their impairment(s) and/or illnesses. Isobella explained:

I can't work full time and...well, who's going to employ me? Again, that comes down to I don't think I'm employable. (DBC, W3)

While three of the five disabled participants followed longitudinally did articulate a future desire to find paid employment, for two of the sample this was not a consideration, given that they were both nearing the age of retirement. All five of the jobseekers followed over time expressed clear aspirations to enter paid employment, although one, James, did have periods when he was not actively seeking paid employment. For the single parents, four had clear aspirations to enter paid employment, although only three were taking active steps to find paid work throughout the period of the study. The longitudinal sample can be segmented into three categories; active jobseekers, those who felt unable to enter paid employment due to illness and disability and those with a more ambiguous relationship with paid employment. As a short hand, these three groups can be classified as 'employment seekers', 'employment unrealistic' and 'employment ambiguous'. The spread of the three groups according to benefit type is outlined in the chart below.

Figure 15 Orientations towards employment - LSMP



It is worth reflecting on the work orientations and experiences of the three claimants who can be crudely classified as 'employment ambiguous'. This is particularly important given that the government would see such individuals as being particularly likely to require, and benefit from, welfare conditionality and the threat of benefit

sanctions. All three had previous experiences of paid employment, and so did not fit into a neat characterisation of out-of-work claimants completely detached from the paid labour market. James, a young jobseeker, was living in supported housing when he was first interviewed following a period of homelessness. He had always worked in the past but explained that his housing circumstances were currently preventing him from actively seeking work:

At the minute...I know I'm on jobseeker's but I don't seek work because if I got work I couldn't afford my home so I don't go looking ...We worked it out before in the [support worker's] office and they said... 'you couldn't afford to live in one of these and [be] working full-time on minimum wage'. (W1).

James' support worker had advised him to hold off seeking paid employment until he secured affordable housing, which he managed to do between the second and third interview. By the time of the third interview, James had started to actively seek work, given that he would now be able to afford to pay his rent if he were to find paid employment. James' experiences demonstrate the barriers to paid employment which can sometimes impact upon, and shape, people's choices and orientations towards employment. He found his situation frustrating and difficult to rationalise:

[The] cost of living [is] stopping me from going to work.... It sounds stupid, don't it...Go to work and can't afford to live. Go on benefits and barely, you can, but only just, but you can do it. (W1)

It is important to note how James' relationship with paid employment changed over time, in close conjunction with broader changes to his circumstances, which were themselves closely linked to social welfare provisions (in this case housing). There is perhaps scope for a policy response that is more attentive to these changes in people's lives, and in particular to how these changes can impact and sometimes constrain individuals' work-readiness. Arguably, what James needed was not compulsion and conditions, but a benefit system sufficiently personalised to recognise how his additional housing costs were making a transition into paid employment unaffordable. Without any action to address this, it was very difficult for James to move into paid employment until his situation changed.

The situations of Chloe and Karen, both single parents, were arguably more complicated. Karen described wanting to enter paid employment, but did not seem to be taking any active steps to find a job, which could perhaps be linked to her poor self-confidence and a fear of making changes to her current situation. She had a history of domestic violence, and had moved around several times to escape from

her violent ex-partner. Talking about whether she might enter paid employment soon, Karen reflected:

It feels like a long time for it to come...It's getting out there, finding jobs, applying for them, doing interviews. Trying to make yourself look smart when you've got nowt to wear [laughs]. It's just things like that really. (W1)

Karen described wanting to enter paid employment but not feeling ready or able to take the steps necessary to do so. Significantly, as discussed later, she was offered only very limited welfare-to-work support.

Only one participant, Chloe, could perhaps be described as actively choosing benefits over paid employment. In the first interview, Chloe spoke about not wanting to seek work, relating her standpoint to the poor financial rewards of employment:

I won't be able to afford [to go back to work]. I'll have to go move in with my dad or summat because I can't afford to pay rent and everything and work. Because then I'll have to pay council tax, water rates, rent and then pay for school dinners and...it will be hard.. I don't want to go to work... (W1)

Chloe explained that she could see the advantages of paid employment, but these were offset by what she saw as the financial costs associated with a move into the formal labour market:

[Work] wouldn't pay. It'd be good to go back to work cos it would get me out of the house, give me a break from the kids but...it isn't worth it so I don't see the point in it.... (Chloe, W1)

She described how she felt she would need to earn significant sums of money to be better off in paid employment, and displayed a lack of awareness of the availability of in-work financial support. When asked how much she would need to earn to make employment worthwhile, Chloe replied:

Four, five hundred pound a week would do it...But what job is going to pay you four hundred or five hundred pound a week? (W1)

Over time, Chloe's position fluctuated and when asked in her final interview, "what's the one thing you most want to change about your current situation?" she responded; "to already have a job and... a routine. I need a stable routine." (W3) Chloe clearly had an ambiguous relationship with paid employment, and her resistance to paid employment could be highlighted by those who defend an emphasis on work-related welfare conditionality. In the course of the research, Chloe was made subject to work-related conditionality, and how this impacted upon her is explored in detail in Chapter 7.

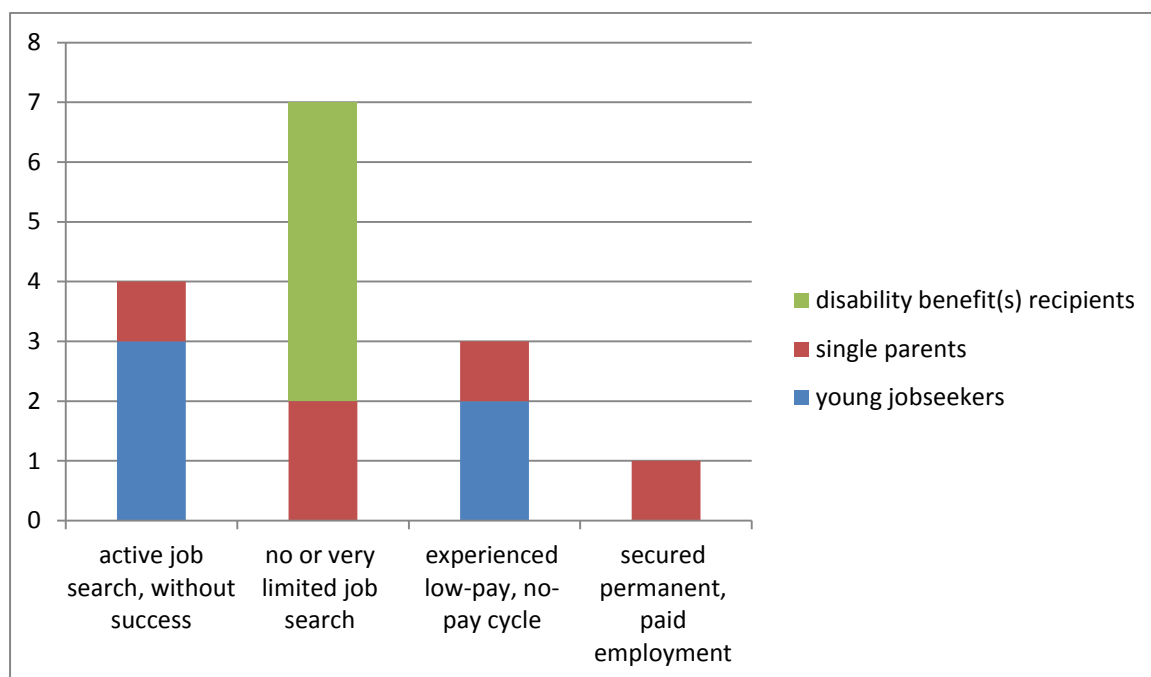
It is notable that even for the three participants whose orientation towards paid employment is perhaps best described as 'ambiguous', they all still - at times - discussed their aspiration to enter paid employment, with all three also mentioning the various non-pecuniary advantages of employment. This reinforces the central place that almost all participants reserved for paid employment in their imagined futures, as well as the common valorisation of the social and psychological rewards of employment, a valorisation which fits well with the government's own emphasis on employment's transformative potential.

6.3 Employment experiences

6.3.1 Paid employment journeys - moving into (and out of) work

Alongside an emphasis on the innate rewards associated with employment, the government's narrative also tends to imply two distinct categories of out-of-work benefit claimants and hardworking families (see Chapter 3). However, the lived reality for many is of frequent movements in and out of work, and on and off benefits (Shildrick et al., 2012b). This chapter now explores these working experiences, looking first at movements into employment during the research, then experiences of informal work and the work that searching for jobs involves. The chart below details the various employment journeys for the longitudinal sample, and demonstrates how almost a third of the sample (four participants) found paid employment at points during the research time frame. Four other participants spent the research period seeking employment without success, with implications for their self-esteem and self-confidence.

Figure 16 Employment journeys during research - LSMP



During the research, Robert and Josh both had a series of spells in and out of work, with their experiences characteristic of the low-pay, no-pay cycle identified in Shildrick et al's (2012) study. The employment was badly paid (in each case below the National Minimum Wage) insecure and temporary, and did not enable them to escape poverty. Arguably, both Robert and Josh were being exploited in some of the roles which they took on. Robert did a temporary "crappy job" (W2) in water chlorination, which attracted a 'fixed' rate of pay of £30 a day, even though he sometimes had to work 12-14 hour days, and Josh received just £80 remuneration for working approximately 35 hours a week in a corner shop (£136.65 less than he was entitled to under the 2012 National Minimum Wage rate of £6.19 an hour).

Josh's role in the corner shop developed and evolved over time, starting whilst he was still claiming JSA. Initially, the owner asked Josh to "help out" in the shop occasionally, in exchange for food, tobacco and sometimes small sums of money. Later, the owner agreed to formalise Josh's role and pay him a set weekly wage. Josh explained:

Before he wasn't paying me, he was just paying me in kind, groceries etc. and now he's paying me...but that's only because I told him that the Job Centre were forcing me to do [the]...Work Programme and he said, "right I want you

here rather than doing work for them” ...so he offered me some cash for it.
(YJS, W3)

It is notable that, for Josh, a WP referral precipitated his signing off benefits and instead moving into the informal economy. This is an example of conditionality operating to reduce benefit take-up, but not necessarily to support people into long-term, sustainable employment, something highlighted in the research evidence on conditionality and sanctions (Loopstra et al., 2015; Watts et al., 2014)

Josh knew that his employment in the corner shop was “kind of a rip off” but was determined to keep the role:

It’s all I can get at the minute. I can’t seem to find anywhere else. I keep applying and nowhere seems to want me so I’ll take what I can get really.
(W3)

As well as working in the shop, Josh had two spells of temporary, seasonal employment with Royal Mail. This was arranged by an employment agency, and Josh described many problems with this type of temporary, insecure employment, including uncertainty over the number of hours to be worked, long delays in receiving pay and low wages.

For Robert, temporary roles in water chlorination and on a building site were secured in addition to a permanent, part-time role as a steward at the local football stadium. Robert averaged only about ten hours work a month in his stewarding role, and so had to claim JSA when he could not find any additional employment, a classic example of the common, and growing, issue of underemployment (Harkness et al., 2012; TUC, 2014). Robert was so keen to work that he also occasionally helped his friend out “for nothing” with his water chlorination business, as he preferred that to the inactivity he associated with benefits and saw it as a “favour for a favour” (W3) as his friend sometimes lent him money.

Sophie also secured employment during the study, finding a sales job that she could initially combine with the parenting of her three children. She talked of her pride in securing the role:

[I] found it through [local newspaper], phoned them up, they rang me back, interviewed and then...got the job, which I were quite proud. First interview in five years and got the job straight away. (SP, W3)

Although Sophie enjoyed the job, when the school holidays arrived she was unable to find child care and so had no choice but to terminate her employment. This was very disappointing for her:

When I were working, it was something to tell the kids about when I come home from work. Just sit at the table, have our meal as normal and they'd be like "oh, what did you do at work? Did you get any sales mummy?" And the kids used to buzz off of it, and we'd buzz off of each other. And now it's just, "oh no, cleaned up, went shopping", same, same.... (W3).

Importantly, for Robert, Josh and Sophie, there was an element of demoralisation in the experience of securing employment, only to lose it shortly afterwards (in each case due to demand side and structural barriers rather than anything connected with the individuals' behaviour or conduct in work). However, they remained completely committed to 'getting off' benefits and into employment. At the time of the third interview, Robert had just finished a period of employment on a building site and was busy trying to secure a new position, ideally as a security guard. Sophie was also actively seeking employment, with Josh still employed at the shop and preparing to start another contract with Royal Mail.

In many ways, Josh, Robert and Sophie's working experiences closely match the defining features of what Standing has characterised as a new class in the making, the precariat (2014). Standing describes:

a multitude of people living bits-and-pieces lives, having short-term or casual jobs interspersed with periods of unemployment or labour market withdrawal, with insecure incomes, few assured enterprise or state benefits, and a lack of occupational careers (2011b, p.11).

While Josh, Robert and Sophie experienced short-term employment, and then re-entry onto benefits, for Rosie the research period coincided with her transition into fixed-term employment, which included the prospect of career development and advancement. Rosie was employed by her own housing association following first a period of employment-related support, and then work experience with them.

Reflecting back on the transition from benefits to employment, Rosie described the initial support from the housing association as critical:

[The housing association] picked me up and helped me along... and they put me on the [employability] course which is all about improving your confidence and things...they've just given me that push and I kept going and going. (SP, W3)

Rosie conceptualised this shift from benefits to employment as transformative:

It made a big difference [getting a job], especially to me, because I've worked all my life, and I don't do very well not working, because I feel like I've not got

anything going for me, and I need something to keep me going, otherwise I end up in a bit of a depression state. It just felt amazing, the money as well, the fact that you're getting up and getting dressed to go out the door, and you're coming home and you're glad to be at home, rather than sick of stuck in the house. It's great. I couldn't ever go back to it [benefits]. (W3)

Rosie's enthusiasm for working was in notable contrast to her earlier description of relying on out-of-work benefits:

It's not even about the money [being on benefits]. It's just this, not doing anything. I'm sick of it. I'm sick of not doing anything...Even like going out. It's not a rush to go anywhere...I feel like I want a routine in my life and it's just not happening on benefits. (W1)

In each case where a participant in this research did find employment this was the result of their own efforts, and there was no evidence of welfare-to-work providers or Job Centre advisers assisting in the transition to employment. Rather, it was the result of active and determined job searches, with support agencies and informal networks often playing a particularly critical role. For example, Robert found both of the jobs he secured during the course of the study through "word of mouth" from friends, and Rosie attributed her transition into employment to the support provided by her housing association. Shildrick et al (2012b) have highlighted the important role frequently played by informal social networks in helping people secure employment at the lower end of the labour market, warning that while this can be valuable in assisting people to find jobs, it also tends to lock them into the low-pay, no-pay cycle, given the type of jobs that are typically recruited in this way.

6.3.2 Experiences of 'poor work'

Significantly, while all four of the participants who found work during the course of the study described their employment experiences positively, in no case did the income received in employment enable them to escape poverty, or even to become significantly financially better off. In-work poverty remains a significant problem, and one neglected by the welfare-to-work policy narrative (Crisp et al., 2009; Lister, 2004; Newman, 2011; Ray et al., 2010; Wright, 2009). In Britain, one in five workers is classified as low paid, with low pay often persisting over time due to a proliferation of low-skilled, insecure jobs offering little chance of progression (Corlett and Whittaker, 2014; Hurrell, 2013).

Although the employment which Sophie, Robert and Josh secured could be described as 'poor work' (low-paid, insecure and low-skilled), they each described deriving satisfaction from their jobs. As Shildrick et al (2012b) found in their study of

the low-pay, no pay cycle, 'poor work' is still attractive to many people, generating a range of social benefits even when it also contains negative aspects. The conclusion of Batty et al (2011) is pertinent:

Labels such as 'poor work', 'donkey work' or 'junk jobs' fail to capture some of the value attached to work at the lower end of the labour market. While it is certainly the case that such forms of employment can involve low pay, long or unsocial hours and pervasive insecurity, it is also evident that these jobs can still generate esteem and provide the basis on which dignified working identities can be constructed (p.25).

There is understandably an increased emphasis among campaigners and charities for more to be done to secure 'good jobs' for all but we need to be careful to recognise the advantages which many associate with their engagement in 'poor work'. That is not to say that action to improve pay and conditions is not required, only that it is critical to avoid a jobs snobbery which can unfairly and incorrectly dismiss certain roles as having little intrinsic value. Focus is perhaps particularly required on those aspects of employment whose presence can be decisive in ensuring that employment is experienced positively and delivers the full range of non-pecuniary rewards, notably security, flexibility and a high-quality psychosocial environment (Butterworth et al., 2013; Krause, 2014; Wadell and Burton, 2006)

6.3.3 Informal work

As well as formal experiences of paid employment, several of the participants also described informal working experiences, either historically or during the course of the research. Informal working while also claiming out-of-work benefits has been described as a sometimes critical mechanism of survival for those living in low-income neighbourhoods (Crisp et al., 2009; Katungi et al., 2012; Smith, 2005). Sam, for example, worked cash in hand as a cleaner in a fish and chip shop:

I was working at this fish and chip shop... just cleaning and stuff...It was all right because I needed the money...a fiver an hour. I know it's not much but it were cash in hand. (YJS, W3)

Smith (2005) has described informal work as having the scope to act as a stepping stone to more formal paid employment, given that it can preserve work habits and orientations and increase self-confidence. Josh's paid employment in the corner shop is perhaps best characterised as sitting on the margins between formal and informal employment, and developed from more ad hoc informal employment, perhaps supporting Smith's thesis.

Dan felt like he had no choice but to continue to claim benefits when he initially secured paid employment. He explained:

I got my job, but they didn't pay you, like a month in hand... So I was...in a Catch 22, I didn't have no money. I couldn't sign off because I would have had no money to get to the job, so what I did was went to the work...then I had to sign on just to cover rent and to get me food... And then I got caught, working and signing on... I told them, I was just going to do it until I get my first pay and then tell them...And they says "oh, all right", and they...gave me a slap on the hand. So...what can I say?...How do you win in this time? (DBC, W1)

As a result of this experience, Dan terminated his paid employment and continued to rely on out-of-work benefits. There are particular financial challenges and costs associated with transitioning between out-of-work benefits and low-paid, temporary work (Shildrick, 2012), described by Standing (2011b) as a 'precarity trap', given that it can actually prevent people from successfully making the transition into employment as in Dan's example. Problems include an inflexible and often unsupportive benefits system and the difficulty of managing financially once someone has signed off benefits, but before their first pay cheque arrives.

Dan reflected on this trap:

It's not a good thing [to be on benefits], you're just existing innit, but then you think, well, let me try, and then you can't try cos they've got you in that trap. You know when you see a hamster running round, you're trying and you go down, and you think getting a job, you have to pay your rent, you have to work, and you're like flipping hell. (W1)

Although 'working on the side' is condemned in government and media narratives, and is a frequent element of politicians' negative characterisations of benefit 'cheats', it was here described as a neutral activity, and certainly not spoken of with shame or embarrassment. This perhaps reflects an acceptance by participants of informal work as a necessary aspect of their efforts to 'get by' on very low incomes (Smith, 2005).

6.3.4 The work of finding employment

While four of the fifteen participants followed longitudinally did experience spells of employment during the research period, the same number (see earlier chart) were actively involved in looking for work, albeit unsuccessfully. Susan spent the whole research period seeking work, but without success. She tried a number of different strategies, participating in welfare-to-work courses and volunteering to try to gain

additional experience. She took out a loan and saved to buy a computer so that she could continue her job search activities from home, and fit them around her parenting responsibilities. Susan highlighted how the costs of searching for employment could be difficult to meet, given the tight margins involved in 'getting by' on benefits:

One [job application] was online, but the other one I had to go and download the forms from the library which is not cheap as well because it's six forms, which is £1.20 each...plus postage....It is better to do them online, but some [don't]... give you anywhere to send them online... (SP, W3)

James described how he was finding it difficult to find employment, despite having modified his earlier work ambitions and widened his search considerably:

[I am] looking for work a lot of the time....Many a time have I walked up and down [local high street] asking people for one day a week or whatever...just for summat to do. And you can't get it. No way. You do your applications online, but the longer that you're unemployed, the worse that you're getting wanted because they see that you've been unemployed for that long...they don't want to know. (YJS, W3)

For both James and Susan, and indeed for many of the participants, continued efforts to find employment without success proved demoralising. The experiences of unsuccessful job searches, rejections and often simply silence in response to applications and enquiries could have a negative effect on participants' self-esteem and confidence. Susan explained the impact of constantly applying for jobs without success:

You sort of give up on yourself I think. (SP, W2)

Sophie described striving, and largely managing, to stay motivated despite the difficulty in securing paid employment, and this was perhaps helped by her having secured paid employment previously, even if only for a short time. As part of her effort to secure paid employment, Sophie tried unsuccessfully to find voluntary work as a bridge to more formal employment:

Been looking for work. Handed out loads of CVs. Haven't had no replies...Tried to get involved in doing some voluntary work at [hostel]. Handed in me application there. I've had nowt back and that's even unpaid work. (SP, W2)

This was an experience Sophie returned to at her third interview, and was clearly a source of some disappointment:

I'm handing it out like for free and no one's contacting me back. (W3)

Overall, then, the work of finding employment was experienced as demanding and often associated with frequent disappointments and set-backs. Participants often rationalised their lack of success in securing employment in discussing the various barriers to paid employment which they faced, and it is to a discussion of these barriers that this chapter now turns.

6.4 Barriers to paid employment

The government's characterisation of the 'problem' of worklessness implicitly suggests that it is a 'problem' of individuals either choosing not to work, or lacking the skills and (often financial) motivation to make the transition from out-of-work benefits into employment (Newman, 2011; Wright, 2009) (see Chapter 3). Emphasis is placed on the supply-side of the labour market with a concurrent neglect of demand-side barriers to employment, such as an absence of jobs, shortages of suitable, affordable child care and the endurance of discriminatory practices towards disabled people (Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Wright, 2009).

In their third interviews, participants were asked to explore their barriers to employment by looking at a range of barriers on pieces of card, picking out those that applied to them, and then ranking them in descending order of importance. Below, the barriers to work 'towers' produced by Josh (YJS, left) and Susan (SP, right) are reproduced (Figures 17 & 18).

Data from these towers were collated into a matrix showing the various barriers identified by the longitudinal sample (see below, Figure 19). These demonstrate how participants commonly interpreted a range of barriers standing between themselves and paid employment, with space for both structural (demand-side) and individual (supply-side) issues. It should be noted that Rosie did not complete a tower, due to being in employment at the time of the third interview. Cath did not feel well enough to participate in the activity, while it was not possible to arrange a third interview with Karen. The following analysis blends data gained during the towers exercise with the wider discussions about barriers to work which took place in all three interviews.

Figure 17 Josh's barriers to work tower

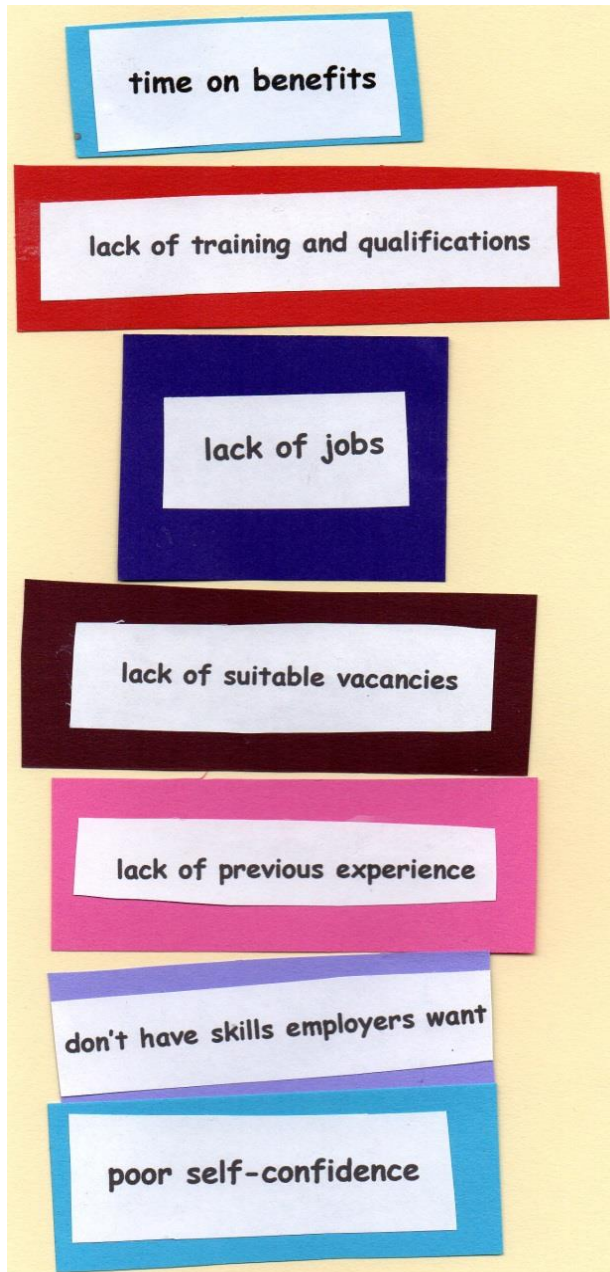


Figure 18 Susan's barriers to work tower

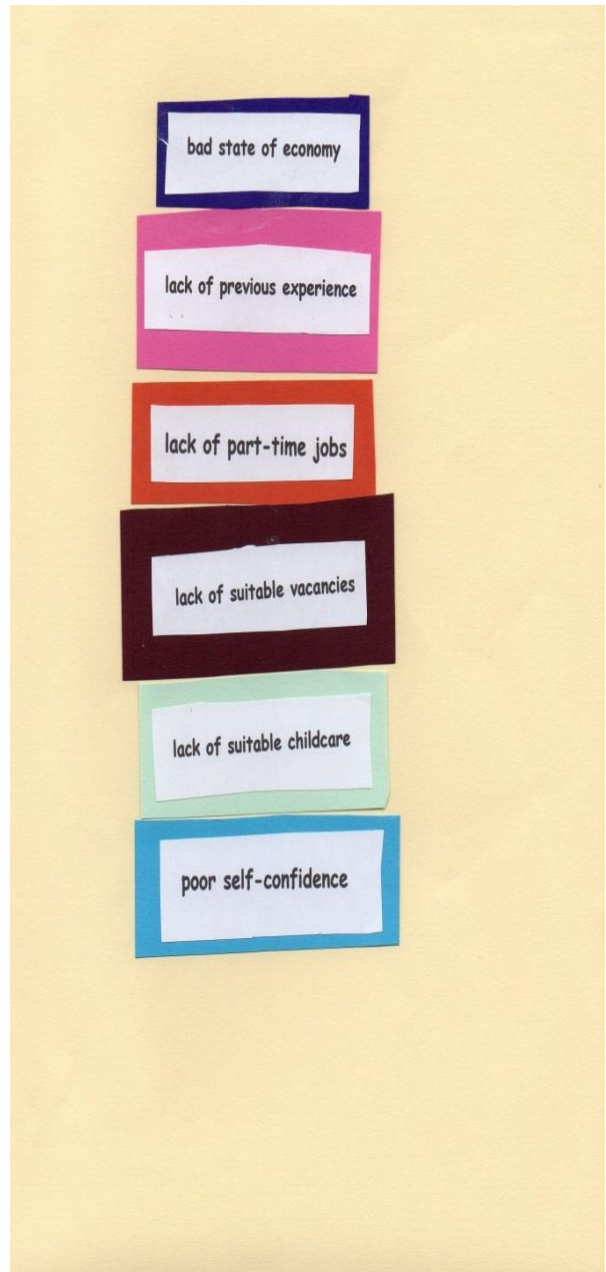


Figure 19 barriers to work identified - LSMP

	Lack of jobs	Bad state of economy	Lack of suitable vacancies	Lack of suitable childcare	Lack of part-time jobs	Illness/disability	Time on benefits	Lack of training/qualifications	Lack of previous experience	Don't have skills employers want	Poor self-confidence	Criminal convictions
James	•	•	•				•	•	•	•		
Adrian	•											•
Sam	•	•	•		•		•		•	•	•	
Robert		•				•	•		•	•		
Josh	•		•				•	•	•	•	•	
Susan		•	•	•	•				•		•	
Chloe						•					•	•
Sophie	•		•	•				•				
Sharon				•		•		•		•	•	
Tessa						•	•					
Isobella		•			•	•						
Kane	•	•				•	•		•			•

6.4.1 Structural barriers

In her tower, the biggest barrier Susan identified was the ‘bad state of the economy’ while Josh put the ‘lack of jobs’ third on his assessment of the barriers which he faced. Across the sample, participants highlighted structural barriers to their entry into paid employment, particularly an absence of jobs and the ongoing impact of the economic downturn. The matrix shows how commonly lack of jobs and suitable vacancies and the bad state of the economy were identified as particular issues. Participants spoke repeatedly of the tendency for employers to offer part-time rather than full-time vacancies, and of issues around ongoing redundancies, which then increased competition for vacancies. In his first interview, Adrian explained: “I’d take

any job at the moment but there's no jobs" (YJS, W1), and this was an issue which he returned to in each of his three interviews.

Sophie asked "how can you go back to work if there's no jobs out there?" (SP, W2), while Susan reflected on the difficulty of competing against those recently made redundant:

There's so much unemployment that the competition is too high... You see stores being closed all the time and... I can't compete with them because they've just been employed. (SP, W3).

There were also discussions of immigration, with the idea that migrant workers are willing to work for less than British nationals, and are sometimes preferred by employers, having clear meaning for several of the participants:

The reason me and a lot of people can't get a job is cos they give them to the immigrants first... Mainly because they think they can pay them less [laughs] and walk all over them more. (JD, DBC, W1)

I had an interview other week and it just seems like you're undesirable, not in a nasty way, but it does seem you're undesirable because you're British. Last interview were full of foreign people and I believe that the reason why he didn't ring me back or consider me [is] because I'm British and because the rest of [the] work people were foreign. (James, YJS, W3)

The difficulty in finding paid employment that could be effectively combined with parental responsibilities, and the availability of suitable childcare and flexible part-time roles, were recurring themes of the study and also feature heavily in the literature on parenting and employment (Citizens Advice Bureau, 2014a; Millar, 2006). Rosie described being offered a full-time position that she was unable and unwilling to accept, due to it leaving her little time to spend with her son, while Susan attributed her failure to find retail work to being unable to work at weekends:

I'm offering the hours while my child is at school. Not many people will take you on. Supermarkets: the moment you mention you cannot work weekends because of childcare, they don't want to take you on. So, this is really hard. (SP, W1)

Over time, Susan re-trained as a teaching assistant, in the hope that this would better enable her to juggle parenting and employment, demonstrating a proactive response to the structural employment barriers she faced:

It's hard to find a part-time job in retail... if it wasn't for childcare... it would be, I think, better in retail because with my experience in the bank I'm used to

dealing with customers rather than children in school. But...I'll have to adjust.
(W3)

All of the disabled participants listed their illnesses/impairment(s) as their greatest barrier to employment. Isobella explained:

If I was an employer looking for ten people, and if I had a skill, or the skills that they needed, I still would be bottom of the list because of my condition...I wouldn't employ me because if I want my business to succeed, I want people who are going to be there, which may be the wrong attitude but people are out there to make money, if you've got to then consider someone having a rest, so you have a room for them it all adds to the costs that they may not recoup by the work that they do. (DBC, W1)

In this way, Isobella seemed to conceptualise her impairments as an individual issue, repeatedly suggesting that she could understand why companies would not want to employ disabled people and seeing little scope in measures to make the labour market more accessible for all. Interestingly, two others within the sample, Robert and Chloe, listed illness/disability as one of their barriers to employment, showing how it is an issue that is not confined to those on disability benefits alone.

6.4.2 Supply-side issues

While it was certainly the case that participants' assessments of their employment barriers placed much more emphasis on structural, demand-side issues than the government's own analysis, it was notable that many also detailed their individual and supply-side barriers (as shown in the matrix above). Barriers repeatedly identified included a lack of training, qualifications, skills and experience, as well as issues around poor self-confidence. In her tower, Susan highlighted issues surrounding her lack of relevant previous experience and poor self-confidence. Josh also identified these barriers, as well as placing importance on employability issues linked to his lack of particular skills and qualifications.

Both Chloe and Karen put particular emphasis on their low self-confidence, and the difficulty in making the transition into paid employment after a long period outside of the formal labour market:

It's difficult for single parents like me, who are in a rut, who don't want to go out or who haven't got no confidence or haven't been to work for a long time...I think it's hard. (Chloe, SP, W3)

[The barrier is] just your confidence really, cos you've not worked for so long. It's that confidence to go for an interview and to apply for a job. (Karen, SP, W1)

Susan repeatedly described how she felt her age was a factor in her struggles to find employment, which she also attributed to the difficulties around accessing full-time work given her responsibilities as a single parent:

I've also got that at the back of my mind thinking "oh who's going to employ me at my age". (SP, W2)

Susan's narrative illustrates the ways in which experiences around paid employment are differentiated according to factors such as age and gender, factors which are not always taken into account in policy responses which tend to treat all out-of-work claimants as a broadly homogeneous group.

There are also real issues with a benefit system that demands that jobseekers be available for work full-time, and so prevents them from engaging in training and further education which could address some of their supply-side barriers and make their longer-term aspirations more achievable. James described his frustration with not being able to undertake appropriate training and education to fulfil his aspiration of becoming a support worker:

It annoys you, because you're going to better yourself, not to sort of do nothing and they say "No, you can't do that". So you can't go nowhere, can you? (YJS, W3).

An exploration of out-of-work participants' own perceptions of their barriers to employment demonstrates that most saw themselves as being impeded by a range of barriers which included both demand-side and supply-side issues. The question then arises as to whether the government's package of welfare-to-work support was enabling them to address and dismantle the supply-side barriers identified, something this chapter now considers.

6.5 The provision of welfare-to-work 'support'

6.5.1 The Work Programme

A growing body of research into the effectiveness of the government's WP has found serious shortcomings in its operation, with particular concerns around support for those furthest from the labour market, such as disabled people and some single parents (Holmes and Oakley, 2013; House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee, 2013; Lawton and Cooke, 2013; Newton et al., 2013) (see Chapter 3).

Notably, only four of the 15 participants followed through the two years of the research study participated in the WP. All four were on JSA, and none displayed particularly entrenched or severe barriers to engagement in the paid labour market. None of the disabled participants was referred to the WP, despite four spending time in the WRAG of ESA. Adrian, the jobseeker who faced the greatest barriers to employment, including criminal convictions and no paid work experience, was not referred onto the WP, although this may have been in part due to his frequently being subject to benefit sanctions. This spread of engagement in the WP is in itself revealing, suggesting that those with the most significant barriers to employment are often not being referred onto the WP, something which existing research also emphasises (Foster et al., 2014; Hale, 2014; National Audit Office, 2012).

Of those who did engage with the WP, there was a notable change in attitude towards the programme over time. On being referred, participants were often eager to receive support, and hopeful that the assistance might prove decisive in helping them make the transition into employment. Susan described her readiness to participate in the WP:

I was happy to go because I'm happy really to try anything that can get me to work because I really, really want to go to work. (SP, W2)

She described finding aspects of the programme useful:

It was helpful. They were nice people, they lift you up...When I was thinking "who can employ me", that kind of views, they teach you "don't say that". I have a better CV and [know] how to do better applications. (W2)

However, Susan became frustrated when a work placement she was promised as part of the programme failed to materialise. Instead, she managed to secure her own placement, volunteering for an agency from which she had previously received support. Susan needed a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check for this placement, and she arranged with the WP provider for this to be undertaken, completing all the necessary forms and travelling into the WP provider's offices twice to submit necessary paperwork. When, several months later, the CRB check had still not been received, Susan spoke to her adviser, only to find out that they had never sent it. This experience left Susan feeling disappointed and let down:

It really made me upset because if they didn't want me to find my own placement, if they weren't happy about it, they only had to say. (W3)

Following the completion of the fieldwork, Susan wrote to the researcher, and reflected on her experiences of the WP:

The Work Programme didn't give me any help at all to find work; from job search, applications, interviews, I did everything myself. All they did was put me down, asking me why I was not getting jobs while I was getting interviews, to the point where I was feeling scared to attend my appointments whenever I failed an interview.

For Susan, the WP arguably worsened the barriers that she faced, with their questioning of her failure to secure a job only reducing her self-esteem and self-confidence.

Susan, Robert and James all noted a marked similarity between the support provided by the WP and that which they had previously received from JCP. Robert described WP experiences which seemed to be almost identical to a typical signing in appointment at the Job Centre, with an emphasis on policing the requirements that claimants are available for, and actively seeking employment:

They go “sign a little piece of paper”...of what jobs you've applied for, and that's it. Then they give you another date. What's the point in that? There's no point. (YJS, W3)

This overlap and continuity, what Whitworth (2013) characterises as a ‘Groundhog Day approach’, is a notable contrast to the innovative and personalised support which the government promised the WP would deliver (DWP, 2011c).

Commonly, participants described brief appointments and a feeling that advisers’ main purpose was to ‘hassle’ them to apply for more jobs. Like Susan, James became increasingly disillusioned with the WP:

All I get told nowadays, not as in help wise, but all my adviser says to me is “I want to see an interview from you”. Not to help me get an interview...no “I just want to see an interview from you”, and that's it. (YJS, W3)

Overall, there was little evidence of innovation in the support provided, with participants commonly referred onto basic skills courses, helped to re-do their CVs and occasionally offered work experience. Particular examples of bad practice included James’ experience of participating in a training qualification where the answers to a test were written on a whiteboard to be reproduced in “your own words” (W3). James also described being put forward for a group interview at Aldi, which he passed but which never went any further. He explained:

I did an Aldi's group interview and I got through to the next part of it and they promised me that I'd get a one-to-one and I ain't heard owt, and I've chased it up, chased it up and I'm now apparently getting told that the [WP] person

that's meant to be running it can't be bothered. So if they can't be bothered, why should I be bothered? (W3)

While the Work Programme is heralded by government as an innovative programme of work-related support, the experiences of the participants in this study was of a programme which in many ways simply replicates what was previously provided by JCP, and there was little evidence of participants seeing the support provided as actually moving them closer to the paid labour market.

6.5.2 Work-related 'support' from Job Centre Plus

Much more common than participation in the WP were regular appointments with JCP via fortnightly signing on appointments or occasional work-focused interviews (WFIs). Even here, however, there were instances where participants were failing to receive this – relatively minor – level of input. For example, Karen was a single parent who had been on IS for four years when first interviewed, and yet she was only invited to attend her first WFI as the point of her transition onto JSA approached, when her son was almost five. Karen was one of those who could be classified as having an ambiguous relationship with employment, and who expressed a range of fears and concerns around making the transition into paid employment. Arguably, she was in particular need of meaningful help and support, and it is thus notable that none was forthcoming.

There were also examples of participants requesting particular assistance from JCP and being refused. Sophie asked for an additional WFI:

I went in a few weeks back, before the kids broke up from school, to ask for a lone parents' adviser meeting to get ready for September when my daughter...starts school. And like "oh, well you have to wait for your appointment. We can't just hand them out like that". I'm like "one minute I'm asking for help to go back to work and you're telling me I have to wait for me appointment"... (SP, W1)

Overall, participants were overwhelmingly negative and dismissive about the support provided by JCP. Rosie contrasted the employment-related support she received from her housing association with a perceived lack of assistance from JCP:

I feel like as soon as you've been for your appointment they've forgotten about you. Even though they've promised that they'll do all these [things for you]. You know, "you're on the waiting list and we'll get back to you next week, we'll ring you", and no, you don't ring me. They've never rung me. It

annoys me... It's like as long as...you've signed on, that's it, you're done, next customer, that's how I feel it is. (SP, W1)

Participants commonly conceptualised the role of advisers as being to police and manage their claim, and often did not even consider the Job Centre as somewhere you might go for employment-related assistance. Josh described how he saw his Job Centre adviser's role:

Just trying to make sure you are actually looking for jobs and if you're not, then, suffer the consequences kind of thing [laughs]. (YJS, W1)

Chloe agreed, explaining that she felt she was only made to go to the Job Centre so they could check "you're not getting away with it basically". (W2) There is arguably a tension between JCP's dual roles as provider of employment-related support and policer of eligibility for financial support (see Chapter 7). There has been growing recognition that JCP is no longer fit for purpose (Bright, 2014; Graham and McQuaid, 2014; Lammy, 2014; Miscampbell and Porter, 2014), with particular criticisms of its role in providing employment-related support, criticisms that the findings from this research only reinforce.

6.5.3 Supporting work aspirations?

Importantly, there was little evidence of encounters with either JCP or WP advisers enabling or assisting the participants in this study to think ahead, and plan for their longer-term futures. Instead, there were examples where participants' own future planning was actually dismissed and undermined by the behaviour and expectations of those who were providing them with welfare-to-work support. For example, Susan explained how her aspirations to secure work as a Teaching Assistant (TA) were dismissed by her WP adviser. After the research period ended, Susan did manage to secure a TA assistant job and, in written communication, reflected on her experiences:

The Work Programme people were getting impatient with me as I was getting interviews but no job...The woman who was running the office told me that I needed to get a job ASAP, that I needed to start looking for any job, especially care work because TA jobs were very competitive because of holidays. I felt so demoralised, I started to doubt myself and the decision I had made to pursue that [TA] job, which I chose to do because of being a single mum. I started getting anxious every time my appointment was coming up. At some point I believed that I was never going to get it. (SP)

Susan's experiences show how her engagement with the WP undermined her longer term aspirations, causing her to doubt whether or not they were actually achievable. This reduced Susan's confidence and although she did manage to secure work as a TA, this was arguably despite of, and not because of, the WP's input.

As well as failing to support participants' future aspirations as in Susan's case, there is also the possibility that the constant short-term demands made of out-of-work claimants by WP and JCP advisers could interfere with and even prevent more strategic, long-term thinking. Participants were often occupied in trying to meet these expectations, with the constant threat of sanctions for non-compliance. The demands made by JCP and WP advisers were short-term and immediate, and were arguably not part of a longer-term strategy for helping participants to secure sustainable paid employment. In this way, it is possible that the process of engagement with both the JCP and WP only contributed to a further shrinking of people's time horizons. Further, the work required to 'prove' job search activities to WP and JCP advisers is best conceptualised as another aspect of what 'getting by' on benefits now involves (see Chapters 5&10).

6.5.4 Inconsistent messages about work-readiness

As well as criticisms of the level of work-related support provided by JCP, a particular issue emerged in terms of the provision of work-related support for disabled people, and particularly those placed in the WRAG. Of the five disabled people followed longitudinally, three spent some time in the WRAG, where they were expected to comply with work-related demands or face possible benefit sanctions. Notably, all three described a lack of relevant support, with a serious issue around inconsistent messages concerning work readiness. Despite being placed in the WRAG, Kane was never invited to attend an in-person WFI or to participate in any other forms of employment support. He explained how this lack of support disappointed and annoyed him:

They never sent me for any job focused interviews or anything like that. [I was] a bit pissed off really...They were meant to be trying to get people into work and they weren't – didn't seem to be trying to get me into work at all.
(DBC, W3)

After being placed in the WRAG of ESA (see Chapter 7), Sharon was required to attend just one WFI. At this appointment, her adviser suggested that future appointments be by telephone, as he did not feel she would benefit from more active work-related activity given the extent of her impairment(s):

He said “from what you say you’re definitely not ready for work so I’ll just...write on to leave you alone for a bit” which I really appreciated... (DBC, W1)

Isobella was also quickly transferred onto telephone WFIs. Both Isobella and Sharon expressed relief at not having to attend the Job Centre, but the judgement of their advisers is perhaps reflective of inconsistent messages regarding benefit claimants’ work-readiness. While the WCA process placed both Sharon and Isobella in the WRAG, and thus found them to have limited capability to work, the JCP staff felt differently, and so did not prioritise them for support or interventions.

Inconsistencies and contradictory suggestions about claimants’ work-readiness would seem to extend to other benefits. For instance, Sophie, a single parent who was migrated onto JSA, explained how JCP advised her that she was perhaps not yet ready to enter paid employment at the point at which she was about to be transferred onto JSA. This was despite Sophie wanting to move into paid employment:

[The job centre adviser said] “aw well we don’t think you’re ready [to work]”. And ‘ra ra’ this and ‘ra ra’ that. “What about some voluntary work”...It was one minute on my case go back to work and now I’m telling you I can go back to work, you’re telling me I can’t in a way (SP, W2)

Given the government’s emphasis on the welfare-to-work transition, and its repeated claim that people are receiving support and help to move into paid employment (cf. Duncan Smith, 2014c; DWP, 2010d), it is particularly notable that some of those deemed ‘work ready’ by the benefits system were being discouraged from entering employment by front line advisers. At the same time, it is also important to note that the welfare-to-work support received was not experienced as helpful by the participants in this study. The government repeatedly promises that with more expectations to return to work will also come more and better support, a ‘welfare contract’ with rights and responsibilities on both sides (see Chapter 3). However, the WP and JCP experiences of the participants in this study were resoundingly negative, with encounters with officials often characterised by patronising, disrespectful treatment (see Chapter 8).

6.6 Imagining better support

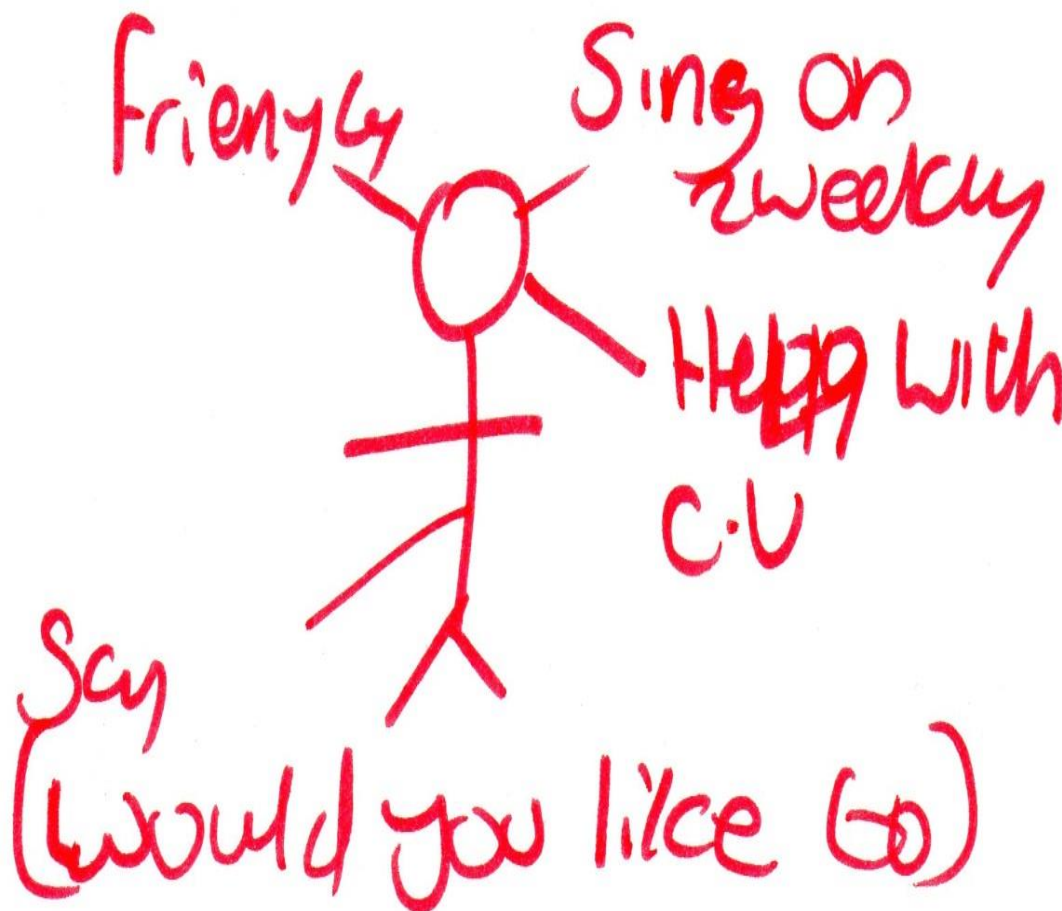
Given the extent of dissatisfaction with the back-to-work support received, in their second interview participants were asked to draw an imaginary back-to-work adviser, listing the qualities such an adviser might have, as well as the types of help, support

and assistance which they might be able to provide. The adviser pictures of James (YJS) and Karen (SP) are reproduced below. What was most notable from this exercise was the emphasis participants placed on the ways in which they would like to be treated by advisers, and how this contrasted with their experiences with both the WP and JCP. Participants commonly described an ideal adviser who would treat them with respect, speak to them politely and be “smiley, not condescending” (Isobella, W2). James highlighted his desire for advisers to “be understanding”, “listen”, be “polite” and “less forceful”, while Karen put emphasis on friendliness and saying “would you like to” rather than “you must”.

Figure 20 James’ perfect back-to-work adviser



Figure 21 Karen's perfect back-to-work adviser



Participants expressed a desire for a working relationship that was more collaborative and equal, in place of the current emphasis on compulsion and instruction. This could include what might seem like fairly basic requests, for example, that advisers make an appointment with you rather than for you, and thus acknowledge and respect your other commitments. Frequently, participants, such as Karen, actually requested more assistance, such as weekly signing in appointments, and this again adds weight to the argument that out-of-work benefit claimants are strongly orientated towards paid employment. These findings hint at the importance of the nature of the relationship between benefit officials and related agencies, and individual claimants, something repeatedly highlighted in the literature (Haux et al., 2012; Lancashire, 2010; Whitworth, 2013; Wright, 2015). Research has consistently found that what matters in the delivery of truly effective welfare-to-work support is the relationship between advisers and individual claimants, and that where this relationship is a positive one, the most positive outcomes are recorded (Hasluck and Green, 2007; Toerien et al., 2013; Walker and Wiseman, 2003). There were little

signs of positive relationships in this study (see Chapter 8), with consequences for the likely success of the welfare-to-work interventions.

6.7 Conclusion

The findings discussed in this chapter suggest a significant lack of fit between government characterisations of out-of-work benefit claimants who 'choose' benefits, and need conditionality to 'support' them into paid employment, and lived realities of individuals with strong and enduring orientations towards paid employment. The values which participants associated with paid employment, and the central place reserved for it in their aspirations for the future, challenges the idea of 'cultures of worklessness' and the posited relationship between non-work and an absence of appropriate values and/or motivations. One participant, Chloe, did describe preferring to be on benefits rather than in paid employment, but she still displayed some orientations towards paid employment, and had worked in the past.

Following the 'employment journeys' of a small group of out-of-work benefit claimants demonstrates the fluidity and transient nature of benefit reliance for many, with a significant proportion of those tracked longitudinally actually moving into employment in the course of the study. These entries into employment were sustained in only one case, with three participants instead experiencing short-term, insecure employment and then a re-entry onto out-of-work benefits. Experiences of the low-pay, no-pay cycle - which are a common finding in research into employment in low-income neighbourhoods (Crisp et al., 2009; Hussain and Silver, 2014; Shildrick et al., 2012b) - represent a challenge to the dominant citizenship model which denotes paid employment as the qualifier to full citizenship status. Are those that move into and out of work only citizens when they are in employment? Critically, the idea of two static groups of 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants', citizens and non-citizens, collapses when we look at the much more complex relationships between employment and out-of-work benefit receipt. Furthermore, the active efforts of many of the participants to secure employment, albeit often without success, suggests that the dominant model of passive, inactive benefit claimants requiring conditions to make the transition from welfare-to-work is flawed (Wright, 2015), with implications for the likely success of this policy approach. Participants typically described a range of individual and structural barriers to their engagement in paid employment, at odds with the government's one-sided focus on individual, supply-side issues. This policy approach only entrenches the exclusionary citizenship consequences of non-employment, given that it accentuates

the supposed blameworthiness and individual failings of those currently relying on out-of-work benefits for all or most of their income (Newman, 2011). Significantly, the participants in this study were frequently dismissive about the employment-related support received from JCP and the WP, with little evidence of the high-quality, world class support proclaimed by the government (DWP, 2011c; Patrick, 2014a). The government's enforcement of out-of-work benefit claimants' responsibilities as part of a 'welfare contract' needs to be realigned to allow a frank consideration of whether the government's own duties to provide meaningful and enabling employment-related support are also being fulfilled (Crisp et al., 2009; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013).

One area where government narrative and individual lived experiences do coincide is in the central place both reserve for paid employment as a marker of independence and a valued and valuable activity, with the transition from benefits to paid employment conceptualised as having the scope to deliver transformative change. While those who moved into employment in the course of the study typically entered low-paid, unskilled and even exploitative roles, they still described positive advantages flowing from these experiences, particularly when contrasted with reliance on out-of-work benefits. This finding is consistent with other studies, which have frequently found strong personal commitment to employment, even amongst those not currently working or those churning between jobs and benefits as part of the low-pay, no-pay cycle (Crisp et al., 2009; Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992; Haux et al., 2012; Hickman et al., 2014; Hussain and Silver, 2014; Shildrick et al., 2012b). Such evidence suggests that the government's focus on welfare-to-work as an overarching direction of travel dovetails with the aspirations and efforts of most of the participants in this study.

Despite the primacy which participants accorded to paid employment, there also remains a question of whether it should be so exclusively equated with citizenship duty, given the consequences that arise from this for those who are not currently in paid employment. Both the citizenship conception adopted, with the suggestion that paid employment should be understood as synonymous with fulfilling one's responsibilities as a citizen, and the analysis of the status quo, primarily the association between benefit claiming and passivity and inactivity, are flawed. There are four key shortcomings with the current emphasis on paid employment as the marker of the dutiful citizen. Firstly, it is inevitably exclusionary for those who simply cannot enter paid employment, such as many disabled people (Lister, 2003; Roulstone and Prideaux, 2012). Secondly, it neglects the various other forms of socially valuable contribution in which people are so often engaged, as well as the

hard work which being on benefits so often entails (Lister, 2003; Patrick, 2013b) (see chapter 5). Thirdly, it fails to recognise that paid employment is not a static state, with fluid movements into and out of employment increasingly common (Shildrick et al., 2012b). Finally, the way in which it is operationalised by government – with their focus on the individual responsibility of people to enter employment, and concurrent neglect of their own responsibilities to enable this transition – is unbalanced and tends to contribute to an individualising of the ‘problem’ of economic inactivity (Wright, 2015).

There is no doubt that moving into paid employment can be beneficial for many out-of-work benefit claimants, and can have positive consequences in terms of both individual rewards and wider processes of social inclusion (Lister, 1999). However, the current citizenship approach arguably makes people’s entry into paid employment less rather than more likely, given the scarring effects of its related processes of stigmatising, ‘othering’ and devaluing the contribution of ‘non-working’ benefit claimants. Ironically, focusing on paid employment as the marker of the dutiful citizen only increases the exclusionary potential of social citizenship, highlighting its ‘Janus-faced’ nature (Lister, 2003). In their welfare-to-work effort, the coalition have introduced a range of welfare reforms which are justified with recourse to ideas around making work pay, tackling ‘welfare dependency’ and creating clear financial incentives for moving into employment. The participants in this study were directly affected by these reforms. The next chapter outlines and considers these experiences, and the citizenship implications of the welfare reforms introduced.

Chapter 7 Experiencing welfare reform

7.1 Introduction

David Cameron's coalition has presided over a significant programme of welfare reform, designed to give "new purpose, new opportunity, new hope – and yes, new responsibility to people who had previously been written off with no chance." (2014c, unpaginated) (see Chapter 3). This chapter focuses on the lived experiences of these reforms for those directly affected by some of the changes introduced. Each of the participants followed longitudinally experienced some changes in their benefits during the research period, and this chapter therefore explores how these changes were anticipated, experienced and reflected upon, focusing on both commonality and diversity of experience across a range of welfare reforms, rather than a detailed exploration of the particular impact of individual policy measures. Welfare reforms included in this analysis encompass the migration of Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants onto Employment and Support Allowance (ESA); the migration of single parents whose youngest child is five onto Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and the strengthening and extension of the conditionality and sanctions regime.

The research presented here covered the early stages of the coalition's welfare reform programme, with the final interviews taking place between late 2012 and early 2013. Since then, significant further welfare reform has been rolled out, with the cumulative impact of reforms continuing to be felt (see Chapter 3). Therefore, this research cannot claim to provide a summative assessment of the impact of welfare reform under the coalition nor does it attempt to do so. Instead, it highlights the consequences of the reforms experienced in the research period.

While Chapter 5 detailed what 'getting by' on benefits today entails, this chapter focuses on the processes and consequences of living with, and responding to, significantly changing social security entitlement. The chapter starts with an outline of participants' anticipations around welfare reform and the worry and anxiety these caused, before considering individuals' 'welfare reform journeys' over time, looking first at the redrawing of eligibility for disability benefits and then the extension of welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions. This is followed by a summary of some of the overarching consequences of welfare reform for the participants in this study, highlighting the impact of the reforms on people's future planning, and aspirations for the future. This summary feeds into a concluding discussion assessing the implications of the current welfare reforms for social citizenship.

7.2 Anticipating welfare reform

7.2.1 Misunderstanding processes of welfare reform

Participants' knowledge about welfare reforms was frequently garnered from friends and 'the grapevine', with rumours circulating, some of them inaccurate. Official governmental communication – when it came at all – was often reported as difficult to understand. Cath highlighted a relative absence of information from the government, and the fear this caused:

It's more scary [than when last met] because it's been a bit of a silence. Loads of scare stories but silence from [the] government. We all know it's going to happen, but they've sort of said it, then gone quiet. Not talking to us. (DBC, W2)

Word-of-mouth communications about welfare reform, while being important sources of information, also sometimes added to the anxiety and unease around forthcoming benefit changes, particularly where rumours included the suggestion that ever harsher and more punitive changes were being introduced. In a particularly common area of mis-information and misunderstanding, three of the four single parents anticipating a move from IS onto JSA assumed that this would lead to a reduction in the income they received, when in fact the change is not a financial one, but the introduction of the obligation to be available for and actively seeking work. These single parents were therefore often worrying – unnecessarily – about how they would manage with less money when they were moved onto JSA. Karen explained:

I'll have to manage my money a bit better until I find a job...[because] I think it's a lower income on it [JSA]...I'm sure it is. (SP, W2)

7.2.2 Gaps between anticipated and actual impact

In following people over time, it was possible to explore how far people's anticipations of welfare reform's impact coincided with their experiences. Amongst the disabled participants, there were some notable divergences. Tessa expected the reforms to be targeted at "others", primarily those "playing the system" by abusing the disability label (DBC, W1). These anticipations proved incorrect:

I didn't worry when they were on about all these new reforms... I knew I had treatment resistant paranoid schizophrenia. And I thought...most people know that's a serious illness...people around me got worried, and I said 'it'll be fine, it's for those who've got a bad back and they're playing football on the weekend'....I never thought I'd be fighting. (W2)

By contrast, two other disability benefit claimants, Kane and Cath, were very anxious that the reforms would see them lose eligibility to disability benefits. In fact, both claimants were awarded ESA. Kane described his surprise, and pleasure, at this unexpected outcome:

I thought they'd send me onto Jobseekers. I were pretty pessimistic really.

Interviewer: So how did you feel when you got the letter saying you're in the WRAG?

Surprised more than anything. Surprised and then pretty pleased. (DBC, W2)

Kane said that being awarded ESA was "like a weight off my shoulders" (W2), reflecting the many months of anxiety and worry he had experienced as he waited to be assessed and the impact these reforms can have even when eligibility to benefits is sustained.

7.2.3 Enduring worry and anxiety

Anxiety and worry linked to current and anticipated welfare reforms were particularly evident amongst the disabled sub-sample, who were anxious about their migration from IB onto ESA. Isobella and Jim both highlighted how the worry and uncertainty over the migration was affecting them:

It does feel unknown and also it feels quite depressing in that...although you can say "yes, [my benefits are] going to stop", I don't know what's going to happen. And it does worry me that there's nothing to say that "oh, you'll be all right". (Isobella, DBC, W2)

It puts a lot of stress on [me]...I think about it all the time...And I'm not my own judge and jury so what I'm eligible for...it's in somebody else's hands.

So...you think "what are they going to do?" (Jim, DBC, W1)

For Jim, welfare reforms were associated with powerlessness and an absence of control, a theme which emerged in many of the participants' accounts.

Cath was also scared about the impact the changes would have on her already difficult life:

[I'm] frightened. Frightened because if I'm going to be any worse off I might as well move onto a park bench. Where do you go from here? (DBC, W1)

Many of the participants were worried about possible future reforms, demonstrating the way in which a growing awareness of the shifting policy context and a continuing retrenchment and withdrawal of support created an uncertain and fearful future which impacted upon their present lives. James explained:

I'm coming up to 27 so I'm all right, but they're saying people under 25, living on their own, got to go back to their parents and stuff like that, aren't they? So I'm alright, but I think, well if that's one stage what they're doing, what they gonna do next?...I do panic about that, 'cause I think, what are they gonna do now? Are they going to start saying I've got to go somewhere to me parents, or...instead of living on me own, do I have to go into shared accommodation? That does panic me and worry me, yeah, big time. (YJS, W3)

The worry and anxiety associated with welfare reforms for those directly affected is a consistent theme in the literature (Haux et al., 2012; Lister et al., 2014; Manji, 2013; Roberts and Price, 2014; Wood, 2012; Wood and Grant, 2011), with Garthwaite (2014) recounting the physical fear often associated with the arrival of a brown envelope that heralds official communication from the DWP. In this study, the enduring and pervasive worry and fear which people recounted were clearly having a significant impact on individual lives, with uncertainty about future entitlement often making it particularly difficult to plan for the future and make positive changes. People who were already working hard to 'get by' on benefits (see Chapter 5) were fearful that any further changes would make this struggle simply impossible, with some particularly anxious that changes in entitlement and/or a long sanction would leave them destitute and without recourse to state support. While enduring worry and anxiety are increasingly an inevitable part of the human condition (Robson-Scott, 2013), in the case of welfare reform affected individuals are concerned about something over which they have very little, if any, control. The migration onto ESA was commonly anticipated with fear and anxiety, and this chapter now outlines experiences of this process.

7.3 Re-drawing of eligibility for disability benefits

All five of the disabled participants followed longitudinally were reassessed for ESA as part of the IB-ESA migration process. A great deal has been published on the flaws and shortcomings of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which determines eligibility for ESA, with particular concerns about whether the process is wrongly finding some people Fit for Work (FFW), and incorrectly placing some of those with very serious impairments and/or health conditions in the WRAG, where they are expected to participate in work-related activity or risk benefit sanctions (Citizens Advice Bureau, 2014b; Grover and Piggott, 2012; House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, 2014) (see Chapter 3). In this sample, only two of the participants experienced a face-to-face WCA, with the other three's eligibility for ESA determined by their completion of the initial questionnaire (ESA50) and – on

occasions – supplementary written information. Across this sample, three of the five disabled participants were unhappy with the initial decision made about their entitlement to ESA. Notably, all three participants challenged these decisions and all three were successful in overturning the original decision. The ESA journeys of the five participants subject to the IB-ESA migration are outlined in the table below.

Table 4 IB - ESA migration experiences within LSMP

	Participant	Had a face-to-face WCA	Initial decision	Outcome appeal	Support with appeal	Experienced repeat assessments in research period
Happy with initial decision	Kane	•	WRAG			
	Cath		SG			
Unhappy with initial decision	Isobella		WRAG	SG	•	
	Tessa		WRAG	SG	•	•
	Sharon	•	Fit for Work	WRAG	•	•

This table shows that in each of the three cases where the initial ESA decision was challenged, participants were supported with the appeals process, in two cases by welfare rights officials, and in one by a specialist health support worker. The participants conceptualised the support they had received as critical, with two saying it had made a decisive difference in their feeling able and confident to actually go through with the challenge. The government has since withdrawn Legal Aid support for all benefit cases (except those involving the Upper Tribunal and Judicial Review), meaning that there is no longer any financial support from the state to enable advice agencies to represent and support people seeking to challenge benefit decisions (Ministry of Justice, 2014).

7.3.1 Experiencing ESA

7.3.1.1 The Work Capability Assessment

In exploring the nature of the IB-ESA migratory process, Sharon’s ‘welfare reform journey’ is outlined as a case study, with examples of commonality between her experiences and that of others from within the disabled sub-sample also highlighted.

About a year before the first interview, Sharon attended a WCA where she was found fit for work:

I think I answered about two, three questions and the other two were yes or no answers so I don't feel that I had enough time in the interview for him to assess me. I didn't feel like I had a chance really to explain my side, and my point of view... To actually explain how I feel and how hard it is just for me to go outside... (DBC, W1)

Several of the disabled participants described their current and previous experiences of medicals in very negative terms. The brevity and superficial nature of the interaction was frequently mentioned:

They ask questions and they want the briefest of answers. How can you have a feel or an understanding of what people are going through in their lives? You might as well send them a form. (Cath, DBC, W1)

At the WCA, claimants are awarded a number of points based on the extent of their limited capability to work, with a threshold of 15 points necessary for a WRAG ESA award (DWP, 2012a). Sharon described being awarded zero points:

He [assessor] wrote down that I had anxiety but he wrote down that I had no points...the decision really, really upset me. (W1)

When I went to [assessment centre] I had no idea that he were scoring me...putting points on me and that 'cause I felt that it were a bit degrading. (W1)

Amy (part of the larger sample) was interviewed very shortly after a WCA had found her fit for work, and conceptualised herself as failing the medical:

I had a medical assessment as part of the requirements for assessing if I'm suitable to go out to work or not and I failed it...didn't get any points at all... (DBC, W1)

It is common for people to construe themselves as 'failing' the medical when they are found FFW; and this is perhaps partially because the medical assessor's judgement fails to fit with that of the individual being assessed (Adams et al., 2011). Certainly, this was the case for Sharon and Amy who both felt that the extent of their impairments meant that paid employment was not a realistic objective at the time of the assessment. Disability activists and disability studies academics have long called for disabled people to be recognised as experts, both on their own impairments and the consequences of living in a disabling society (Barnes and Mercer, 1997; Stone and Priestley, 1996). These assessments appeared to cast

disabled people as passive participants in the process to determine eligibility for disability benefits, and to provide little scope for individual claimants' expertise to be recognised.

7.3.1.2 Appeals and tribunals

With support from a welfare rights adviser, Sharon challenged the initial WCA decision and attended a tribunal. Sharon had to wait almost a year between the WCA and the tribunal, and found the long wait difficult:

I was just fed up waiting for...[the tribunal], I just wanted to get it over and done with 'cause I were dreading the day it came 'cause I knew that I had to sit there in front of two complete strangers and basically...explain everything... (W1)

Sharon described how difficult it was to attend the tribunal, and how critical the emotional and practical support of her adviser was in enabling her to do so. The tribunal overturned the original decision, and Sharon was instead placed in the WRAG of ESA. Sharon made an explicit contrast between the tribunal, where she felt she had an opportunity to fully describe the nature and extent of her health issues, and the medical, which was rushed and impersonal:

[The tribunal] was really distressing and upsetting for me...especially when I had to talk about my bladder to two men...I really didn't like talking about that, it really upset me...but I'm just happy it's sorted now...I am angry with the man at the [WCA]...I don't understand how he couldn't see anything. I just think...it's probably down to that he didn't have enough time to assess me... (W1)

7.3.1.3 Repeat re-assessments

Although Sharon was relieved to be awarded ESA at a tribunal, less than a year later her claim was reassessed. Therefore, at the time of the second interview, Sharon was anticipating another long application process and the possibility of her award being revoked:

You worry about it...are they going to say no again and we're going to have to go through all that again or I've just got to go see someone who's judging you and...you know that they're looking at you and staring...it puts you down really. (W2)

In her third interview, Sharon explained that she had been awarded ESA, but had been informed that her eligibility for DLA was now under review. Once again, Sharon was left in a state of anxiety and worry:

I'm really really anxious about it 'cause with them stopping a lot of people I can see them just stopping it and me having to go through the appeal and all that again and it's just really uncomfortable basically. (W3)

The experience of repeat re-assessments has been highlighted in the literature (Wood, 2012), and can be particularly unsettling and destabilising for affected claimants. For Sharon, claiming disability benefits was associated with a persistent experience of stress, anxiety and the repeated need to share personal medical circumstances with strangers, something which she found particularly difficult.

Like Sharon, Tessa experienced repeated re-assessments. During the research period, Tessa was placed in the WRAG and then moved onto the SG following an appeal, and the intervention of her psychiatrist. Only three months had passed before she was sent another questionnaire to complete to re-assess her eligibility for ESA. Initially, Tessa assumed they had made a mistake:

So I rang them up at first and says, "I think you've made a mistake, it's only a couple of months", and they said something about because I didn't have a medical, or anything, that they were saying, I had to fill the form in again. (DBC, W3)

Tessa did not hear anything after she submitted the form in early July, and it was only when she called for an update in late October that it was confirmed that she was still in the SG, with no changes to her entitlement. Tessa had put off calling the DWP throughout the summer, as she was scared of being given bad news, and so the anxiety and worry about her re-assessment had endured for several months. She explained how difficult she found it to make the phone call, demonstrating the strength she had to draw on in order to do so:

Eventually I just plucked up the courage, I thought I'm going to have to ring them 'cause they might just be stopping it or they might not have made a decision....I just picked up the phone, I thought I'll have to do it 'cause of all this not knowing. (W3)

7.3.1.4 The work of challenging decisions

As highlighted in the table above, where participants disputed the initial ESA decision they appealed and challenged it, demonstrating active resistance to officials' judgements and classification. Indeed, the active agency and considerable hard work involved in making these appeals arguably serves as yet another counter to the notion of passive and inactive benefit claimants. Like Sharon, Isobella had a long struggle with the DWP following an initial decision – made without a WCA taking

place – that she should be placed in the WRAG of ESA. As Isobella was a home owner with fairly substantial savings, this decision meant she was subject to new rules limiting entitlement to contributory ESA to twelve months for those in the WRAG. Initially unaware of the ramifications of being placed in the WRAG, Isobella only realised she could find herself with no benefits as her year on ESA came to an end:

I was so upset... speaking to this woman who said [my benefits were ending]. Everywhere I turned, there was nothing that could be done, and all the avenues were slowly closing down, one by one. (DBC, W3)

At the same time as dealing with her ESA, Isobella was also appealing a decision on DLA (which was ultimately unsuccessful), and so she was in frequent communication with the DWP. She described the toll this was taking:

It [challenging the DWP] does take a lot out of you. I mean I think especially with the rheumatoid arthritis because it's a fatigue side as well so I do get very tired very quickly and all this is such a bore trying to sort it out, and it expends energy that really I'd rather spend on something else... when you're in the system like this it can be very down-heartening, time consuming and energy sapping. (W2)

She repeatedly described how she sometimes put off making phone calls to the DWP, and had to be in the right frame of mind before speaking to them:

It's got to be on a good day for me [to ring them]...I've got to think, oh right, okay, I...feel...ready to fight. Although obviously you don't have to fight but you need that push, that energy. (W3)

Ultimately, Isobella's fight proved successful, after she enlisted her MP's support, something she explained in communication with the researcher after the study ended. Following the MP's input, a senior DWP decision maker reviewed Isobella's case and placed her in the SG where she would be unaffected by time limiting.

Another disability benefit claimant, Cath, was eventually awarded DLA after a successful appeal (and following two previously unsuccessful applications). Cath described how the long process of trying to claim DLA had affected her, arguing that the system:

...grind[s] you down. That's the system, it's designed to do it. Yeah...and they do it well as well. (DBC, W2).

After finding out about the second unsuccessful application, Cath burnt all her papers:

When I got home that evening I burnt 'em and I thought, 'that's it, I'm finished with [them]. You can't fight 'em'. (W2)

Despite wanting to 'give up', with the support of a welfare rights adviser Cath appealed this decision, attending a tribunal where she was awarded DLA. She described how she drew on her reserves of strength and resilience:

I get bursts of, we'd say 'spunk and grit', do you know what I'm saying?...And it comes from inside, and [you think] "just yes and do it." (W3)

Importantly, the DLA award made a significant difference to Cath's life, giving her an – admittedly small – financial cushion and helping her to meet the extra costs associated with her impairments. Cath reflected on the difference it had made:

Worry. Gone. Gone. No more stale bread, no more off milk, no more going without...a conversation of lack, constant lack is not here anymore...The worry has just gone, the constant worry. It was like constant rain. (W3)

The work of challenging benefit decisions is time intensive, emotionally draining and requires considerable energy and resilience. Critically, though, as a result of this work, the participants in this study typically experienced significant qualitative improvements in their circumstances in relation to benefit entitlement. This has particular implications for others who are perhaps less able or willing to pursue benefit appeals and challenges. Given the energy, efforts and resources required to challenge government decisions about benefit eligibility, there are also questions about whether claimants such as Cath, Isabella and Sharon will be able to continue to display such resilience in the future. Certainly, the Legal Aid reforms and new rules on Mandatory Reconsideration are likely to make the work of challenging decisions more difficult, and could mean some of the most vulnerable simply feel unable to do so. There is also the possibility that the impact of welfare reform on individual lives is eroding people's resilience (Real Life Reform, 2015; Roberts and Price, 2014), given the work demanded in efforts to 'get by' in increasingly difficult circumstances (see Chapter 5).

The introduction of ESA can be interpreted as reclassifying many disabled people as potential workers who require activation, conditions and compulsion to make the transition from benefits into paid employment (Piggott and Grover, 2009; Puttick, 2007). Disabled people who were found to be FFW or placed in the WRAG become subject to work-related conditionality, and it is important now to explore this study's findings on the experiences and impact of the extended conditionality regime.

7.4 Lived experiences of ‘ubiquitous conditionality’ and benefit sanctions

A notable feature of welfare reform over the last 35 years has been the increased reliance on behavioural conditionality in efforts to ‘support’ claimants off benefits and into the formal labour market (Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Dwyer and Wright, 2014). This has continued under the coalition, who have extended both the reach of conditionality and the possible consequences for failure to comply with the regime (see Chapter 3). Despite the consensus across all the main political parties of the central place for welfare conditionality in policy responses to unemployment and economic activity (as well as in a range of other policy domains), the efficacy and ethicality of conditionality remains contested, particularly in the academic community (Dwyer, 2010; Grover, 2012; Patrick, 2011c; Standing, 2014; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013).

This study followed out-of-work benefit claimants’ experiences of welfare conditionality over time, and so was able to explore both immediate and longer-term responses to conditionality and compulsion. The following analysis outlines some of these responses, highlighting how conditionality is operating in various, sometimes contradictory ways, often simultaneously. Given that the study included disability benefit claimants, jobseekers and single parents moving from IS to JSA, the forms of conditionality experienced by the sample included mandatory attendance at appointments, demands to change and/or increase job search activities, and the requirement to participate in welfare-to-work programmes, training courses and unpaid work experience placements. Throughout, sanctions operate as the ever-present threat for non-compliance with these demands (see Chapter 3).

7.4.1 Conditionality mainstreamed

The chart below provides a matrix of the forms of conditionality which the 15 participants followed longitudinally experienced during the research period of 2011-13. It demonstrates the spread and reach of conditionality, as well as illustrating that – unsurprisingly perhaps – the disability benefit claimants were least likely to report multiple forms of conditionality being applied to them, while the young jobseekers were most likely to have experienced the full range of conditionality tools and interventions. The most commonly applied form of conditionality was mandatory attendance at appointments, which included signing on at Job Centres, and Work-focused Interviews (WFIs) for disability benefit claimants and single parents not yet migrated over to JSA.

Figure 22 Experiences of work-related conditionality and sanctions - LSMP

		Mandatory attendance at appointments	Increased/changed job search activity	Mandatory work activity or other unpaid work experience	Compulsory training/skills courses	Mandatory participation in welfare-to-work	Threat of sanctions	Actual sanction	Multiple sanctions
Jobseekers	James	•			•	•	•		
	Adrian	•	•				•	•	•
	Sam	•				•	•	•	
	Robert	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Josh	•	•		•	•	•	•	
Single parents	Susan	•		•		•			
	Chloe	•	•				•	•	
	Sophie	•							
	Karen	•					•		
	Rosie	•				•	•		
Disabled people	Sharon	•					•		
	Tessa	•							
	Isobella	•					•		
	Kane								
	Cath								

The matrix also shows that five of the 15 participants followed longitudinally experienced at least one benefit sanction during the period of the research study. Of these five, for three it was their first sanction, while two of the jobseekers, Adrian and Robert had experienced multiple sanctions. 10 of the participants described being

threatened with sanctions, and it was common for people to speak of the fear that the threat of a sanction engendered.

Kane and Cath were the only participants to report no experience of work-related conditionality during the time of the research study. While Cath was on IB before being transferred to the SG of ESA, Kane was placed in the WRAG of ESA where he would have expected to experience some conditionality as part of efforts to support him into the paid labour market in the longer term. Kane spent over six months in the WRAG, and yet, for unknown reasons, he was never invited to attend a WFI or offered any other work-related support (see Chapter 6). Kane's experiences are perhaps reflective of broader issues with the limited provision of employment support to those in the WRAG (Hale, 2014).

7.4.2 Complex responses to conditionality

A second matrix, highlighting how conditionality was interpreted and experienced by the fifteen participants followed longitudinally, is provided below. Participants' responses to work-related welfare conditionality were often ambiguous and complex, with individuals simultaneously resistant to, and partially welcoming, the compulsion and demands being made of them. To understand these responses, they must be situated within the context – explored in Chapter 6 – of individuals who were, in most cases, displaying strong and clear orientations to engagement in the paid labour market.

Interestingly, another small-scale qualitative longitudinal study of single parents being transferred from IS to JSA also found some implicit welcoming of the conditionality that JSA entailed, with some parents describing increased job search as a positive outcome of their migration onto JSA (Peacey, 2009). Perhaps anticipating such an outcome for herself, in this study Karen described how she felt both excited and frightened about moving onto JSA, and the additional conditions this would involve:

It's good to get out of the house, not to be stuck at home all day, but at the same time I'm scared to get out there and do it all again...It's going to push me to get a job, but at the same time it's pushing me too fast. (SP, W2)

Figure 23 Responses to conditionality - LSMP

	Conditionality experienced as....	unproblematic	a welcome 'extra push'	motivation to enter employment to escape conditionality regime	being forced to do something which do not want to do	a denial of agency/choice	causing fear of hardship/destitution	including unwelcome language, use of compulsion	causing negative relationships with street level advisers	moving one further away from paid labour market
Jobseekers	James		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
	Adrian		•	•	•		•	•	•	•
	Sam	•								
	Robert		•	•	•	•		•	•	
	Josh		•	•	•			•	•	
Single parents	Susan		•	•		•	•	•	•	
	Chloe				•		•	•	•	•
	Sophie	•								
	Karen		•		•		•	•	•	
	Rosie			•	•			•		
Disabled people	Sharon				•			•		
	Tessa				•			•		
	Isobella				•			•	•	•
	Kane	•								
	Cath	•								

Three of the participants (James, Robert and Rosie) explained how circumstances had arisen where it had been suggested to each of them that they could be entitled to disability benefits rather than JSA. Utilising similar arguments, James, Robert and Rosie all decided not to claim disability benefits, as they feared that moving to a

benefit with fewer work-related conditions might make them less likely to enter paid employment in the medium term. Robert explained:

It's just like me going to the doctors and getting a sick note for me bad hips. I could go on disability. I don't want to go on disability. I can go on it, but I choose not to because I want to work. (YJS, W1)

James was advised to consider making an application for disability benefit, due to his ongoing problems with substance misuse:

My support worker...said I should go on [the] sick. At first I thought, oh well fair enough then, and then I thought oh no because it's just going backwards then instead of going forwards.

Interviewer: – so in what way would it feel like it was going backwards?

Because then after being on the sick that'll have been six weeks then where it will be in my head "I can sit about now for six weeks because I don't have to go to the Job Centre"...instead of thinking "I've got to do something otherwise they'll stop my money..." I want to do something instead of sat about... If I'd accepted that sick note and put it in, it would have been in my head that after six weeks I can quite easily go and get another. I could do that all day long... (YJS, W2)

This rationalising suggests that perhaps claimants have become used to, and comfortable with, the conditionality framework, and so are keener to stay within it, especially where they are motivated to find paid employment. It could also be read as evidence that some claimants recognise the benefits of conditionality, in providing them with an institutionally-embedded 'push' to take the steps required to move into the formal labour market. At the same time, however, the very fact that these three participants were effectively making an active choice to stay on a highly conditional benefit speaks to their own motivation to find employment. This runs counter to the government's case for conditionality and compulsion, which rests on the notion that many claimants are actively choosing 'welfare' over 'work'.

For Sophie and Sam, both on JSA by the time of the third interview, conditionality was viewed as largely unproblematic, not because it was not affecting them, but because they were both actively seeking paid employment, and so were relaxed about fulfilling the requirements of work-related conditionality. Anticipating being moved onto JSA, Sophie explained: "It don't bother me one bit." (SP, W2). A year later, Sophie reflected on her transition from IS to JSA:

[It's made] no difference 'cause I were looking for work before anyway. (W3)

7.4.3 Negative experiences of conditionality

All of those who mentioned welfare conditionality operating as a welcome 'extra push' also highlighted its more negative aspects. These encompassed the denial of agency which it was seen to entail; the fear of hardship/destitution underpinning it; a resistance to the language and operation of compulsion and negative consequences for relations between street level advisers and claimants founded on conditionality and the threat of sanctions. Finally, several participants (six of the 15) conceptualised the benefits system, and the constant conditionality, as being so demanding – and unpleasant – that it served as an additional motivation to make the transition into paid employment. Evidently, this last response may be one the government would welcome, especially when viewed from within the rubric of benefits as 'lifestyle choice' (cf. Osborne, 2010b).

Susan grew increasingly weary of her interactions with the JCP and the Work Programme (WP), so that a major advantage of a move into paid employment became the opportunity it would provide to escape from the welfare conditionality regime. She repeatedly described her aspiration for a future:

getting off benefits and being able to support myself, where no one is going to say "do this", "come here", none of that. (SP, W1)

Resistance to the language and operation of conditionality was particularly common, and was a dominant theme to emerge from all three waves of interviews.

Participants often picked up on the lack of choice that conditionality entailed, describing a narrative that simply said 'you must do this', leaving no room for their own preferences to be expressed and valued. This was experienced as a denial of agency. James put it succinctly:

It's like, when you're on benefits, they're controlling what you do and when you do them. You haven't got your own mind, you've got to do everything by what they say...And sometimes you don't want to. (YJS, W1)

7.4.4 Powerlessness, denial of agency and limited resistance

It was common for participants to experience conditionality operating both as a constraint on their ability to exercise individual agency, and also as a paternalistic practice that infantilised affected claimants, treating them as children to be directed and controlled, instead of adults with a right to make choices. On several occasions, James explicitly mentioned how he felt that his encounters with officials were more akin to those between an adult and a child:

[on benefits] you're not getting spoken to like a person...[you're] getting told to like a child. Saying "you will do this, otherwise..." (YJS, W1)

Robert and Cath also characterised some of their interactions with officials as involving being treated like a child, and this was therefore a reoccurring narrative in how participants conceptualised and described their experiences of conditionality. Experiencing conditionality as an authoritarian paternalist intervention was also evident in Susan's description of how the benefits system operated:

It's not a good thing to see us [claimants]...it's like if I gave you food and I had to keep on telling you "you don't eat it like that, I'll just give you that amount"...I don't like it [laughs], it's like yeah they're giving you that little money but it's like, oh my god...I want to get a job (SP, W2)

In recounting these experiences, participants such as Susan are operating in the 'reflexive-constrained-agent' quadrant of Hoggett's (2001) modified typology of agency and reflexivity (see Chapter 1), where they are reflexively aware of their own relative powerlessness, a situation which can lead to feelings of anger, even despair. It is also notable that the main possibility for escape from this situation is conceptualised as in making the move from benefits into paid employment.

While the logic of contractualism, used so often to defend conditionality, suggests two parties freely entering into an agreement with the right to benefits contingent on the responsibility to comply with work-related demands (Deacon, 2002; Dwyer, 2010), the reality is that claimants often have little real choice, particularly when they are completely financially reliant on their out-of-work benefits (Fitzpatrick, 2004; Patrick, 2011b; White, 2003). Robert described being made to sign a contract saying he would apply for ten jobs a week:

[if] I haven't found ten jobs to apply for then they'll sanction my money...I don't know how they can force you to sign a contract for that.

Interviewer: Did you sign the contract then?

Yeah 'cause I had to, otherwise I would've got sanctioned. (YJS, W2)

Robert also described particular frustrations when his WP adviser handed him a ream of paper with around 70 jobs to phone up and apply for, threatening him with a sanction if he did not apply for them all. The roles were in security, which is the sector Robert wanted to work in, but Robert was unable to ring each of the potential employers, due to having no phone credit. Robert's poverty, and the structural constraints this placed on him, made it impossible for him to comply with this work-

related demand. Robert also explained that he was less likely to comply with his adviser's demand because of the way in which she had spoken to him:

It's how she spoke to me about it. Now if she would have said, "would you", not "you have to", that's where they go wrong. If they say "you have to do it", then no, I won't do it. But if it's "would you do it", then yeah I would. But I'm not having somebody telling me to do summat. (W3)

Robert repeatedly recounted refusing to fulfil demands made of him, and experiences of confrontation and open conflict with his JCP and WP advisers. In a discussion about the possibility of being asked to do unpaid work experience, he imagined a hypothetical future scenario where he was asked to clean a school:

It's like 'em saying to me "oh, go and clean the school for an hour and a half a day. But if you quit it you ain't getting no benefits". Well, I'll have a choice of no benefits...That's what I'd choose...Because I've done it [been sanctioned], I know what it's like. (W3)

In this way, Robert was seeking to assert his individual agency – to make choices – if from within a relatively powerless position. He continued to do so throughout the research period, while also simultaneously describing situations where he felt unable to challenge the system, and instead was obligated to comply with the demands made of him. Robert's active response and resistance reinforces Wright's (2015) conclusion that benefit claimants often simultaneously experience powerlessness, a lack of choice and control, and yet still try to take active measures to change and challenge their situation.

7.4.5 Reasons for resistance to conditionality

Over time, a majority of participants followed longitudinally (10 of 15) described how conditionality forced them to do things which they would not otherwise have done, had they been given the choice. Typically, this involved activities such as applying for jobs that the participants did not want, attending appointments, and participating in training and welfare-to-work programmes that were found to be unhelpful. It was here that the reach and impact of conditionality on disabled people was most noted, with three of the disabled sub-sample describing being made to attend WFIs as part of their interaction with welfare conditionality.

Evidently, welfare conditionality is explicitly designed to compel out-of-work welfare claimants to participate in work-related activity which the government deems will help move them closer to the paid labour market, with compulsion intended to counter any resistance to engagement (DWP, 2010b; Gregg, 2008). What was notable in

this research was how frequently participants linked their unwillingness to attend appointments and courses to their perception that these activities were failing to move them closer to the paid labour market, or were inappropriate given other barriers to their participation in paid employment.

Josh, for example, described how he was resistant to participating in a compulsory welfare-to-work programme as he did not think it was helping him to find employment:

[The course] didn't really help me at all...I'll do anything I can just to not go on it...I just didn't see the benefit to it at all... (YJS, W1).

Isobella was frustrated at being compelled to attend WFIs:

It's quite irritating really because if you have a medical report saying one thing, and then the system forces you to attend these interviews or have these appointments, you're thinking... "I'm not fit for work, so why are you wasting time, effort and money forcing me to do these kind of things when life would be a lot simpler [without them]". (DBC, W3)

Sometimes participants were initially keen to participate in these mandatory activities, only becoming resistant when experiences suggested they were less helpful than they had hoped. This was certainly the experience of single parent Susan, who described how her enthusiasm for the WP waned over time, as she began to realise that it was not proving helpful in her ongoing efforts to secure paid employment (see Chapter 6).

7.4.6 Moral rationalities of parenthood

There is a particular ethical issue where welfare conditionality compels people to participate in activities which actually come into conflict with individuals' own sense of responsibility and duty. Drawing on the work of Duncan and Edwards (1999), it is important to consider how the moral rationalities of parenthood are sometimes brought into tension with the demands made of parents by the conditionality regime. There were several examples of the duty and obligation individuals felt as parents being undermined and challenged by the expectations of work-related welfare conditionality. James described being forced to attend WP appointments, even where these clashed with legal appointments relating to his battle to become residential parent for his seven year old daughter:

I believe going to court for [my daughter], and fighting that case, that is really important to me and I need to go there before I go to [work programme], so they should take that sort of thing into consideration instead of just saying,

“Listen, that’s your appointment. If you don’t turn up, skip” ...That’s how they approach it. (YJS, W3)

Sophie also described an inflexibility and lack of understanding towards parents’ particular needs, explaining how she was given an appointment for 5:40pm which she queried:

When they make a time for you, you have to go. I’m like “my kids are in bed at half past six”. They’re like “but that’s not our problem, you have to come or we’ll take so much off your benefits”. (SP, W1)

Parents also described how their parenting work went unvalued by JCP and WP staff, and often unrecognised when making demands and expectations of them. Susan explained how the JCP had tried to make an appointment for her which clashed with the time of her daughter’s swimming lesson:

And then she [Job Centre adviser] said: “are you aware you have an appointment on Friday at twenty past four?” And I said “oh, ok”. And then I remembered, I had just enrolled my daughter in swimming lessons on Fridays, 4.30. So I said “Oh, no I can’t. I’ve just enrolled my daughter” and I think that Friday was going to be the first lesson... And then she went and talked to someone. And then she came back, she said: “Sorry, we cannot accept such excuses”. I said “It’s not an excuse. Look, I’ve got her swimming costume and all that with me.” I got out the receipts. They were still in my purse, and I said, “there’s the receipts as well.” Because it’s not easy for me, to pay like £50. And then the man came as well, and he said “do you know that your priority is attending these appointments?” I said; “I don’t think so,” I said; “My priority is being a mother”. Because whether I’m drawing Job Seeker’s Allowance, whether Income Support, nothing, my daughter will always be there [crying] (SP, W1)

In this example, Susan was experiencing conflicting demands from her dual responsibilities as a parent and jobseeker, responsibilities which are not always easily reconciled. Susan was frustrated and angry that JCP staff assumed that the Jobseeker role should be prioritised, given that this was out of step with her own interpretation and prioritising of her responsibilities. Susan reflected on this experience in two of her interviews, and it had clearly had a significant impact on her as she sought to juggle her parenting responsibilities with the expectations and demands made of her by JCP.

The experiences of Susan, Sophie and James tally with those of parents in a study into welfare reform in London (Jarvie, 2014), who reported how the pressure to enter

paid employment undermined their parenting role. When the conditions of out-of-work benefits compel parents to prioritise their pursuit of paid employment over their parenting, and where this is out of line with their own moral ordering of priorities, the policy agenda is arguably significantly infringing upon and limiting individuals' citizenship rights. This is all the more important, given that this infringement is not equally experienced by all parents in society, but only by those at the bottom end of the income spectrum, whose reliance on the most stigmatised and overt form of state assistance means they are also most subject to the state's punitive and coercive gaze.

7.4.7 Benefit sanctions - Adrian's 'welfare reform journey'

Where people failed to comply with JCP and WP directions, whether due to an unwillingness, inability, or misunderstanding, they faced the risk of benefit sanctions. Even those who were never threatened with sanctions sometimes described a fear of having their benefits stopped in the future, and explained how the possibility of being sanctioned affected their behaviour. When asked if she had ever been threatened with a benefit sanction, Susan responded:

No, because I've never missed anything [laughs]. I'm always so cautious. I've never missed an appointment. I've never missed signing on. Because I'm thinking, oh my God, if I did, what do I do with the bills and the food for my daughter? (SP, W3)

In the following analysis, the experiences of Adrian, who had been sanctioned several times, are outlined and considered. It is valuable to explore his case in detail, given that he faced both lengthy and repeated sanctions. The other participants in the study who were sanctioned faced shorter periods without benefits, but, like Adrian, they highlighted the hardship sanctions caused and the lack of clarity behind sanction decisions.

Adrian was one of a small number of the total sample (two of the 22) who had virtually no experience of paid employment. When first interviewed, Adrian described how he had been sanctioned numerous times in the past, often due to miscommunication and misunderstandings rather than a deliberate failure on his part to comply with work-related activity and requirements. Adrian recounted spending almost a year without any money during a succession of sanctions:

When they didn't tell me about Hardship, I had to go into town every day stealing sandwiches and stuff. And I got caught for this. They sent me to court and I just thought to myself "well, this is maybe what they want me to do", you

know what I mean? I can die or I can commit crime so I thought, “well I’m not letting them win” so I didn’t commit a crime after that. (YJS, W1)

Adrian had been heavily involved in criminal activity as a young person, and showed active resilience in deciding he did not want to fall back into a routine of shoplifting and petty crime in his efforts to ‘get by’ on sanctions. At the time of the first and second interviews, Adrian was on a six month sanction, due to a failure to apply for a job vacancy to which the Job Centre had alerted him:

I did get this, kind of a job, it was door to door sales but it was on commission so I tried it out for a week and then I just... [gave it up] because... what I was trying to sell nobody in this economic crisis, nobody were buying it. But what the Job Centre have done – they’ve given me a sheet – the sheet says I have to apply for this [café] job but I already applied for that [sales] job and got that job...so they sanctioned me for not applying for this [café] job even though I already had that [sales] job. (W1)

Adrian found the logic for this sanction difficult to understand, and his experiences tally with what Alison Garnham, Chief Executive of the Child Poverty Action Group, has called the ‘frail grounds’ behind many sanction decisions in the current policy climate (cited in Ahrends, 2015).

When asked how he felt when he realised he had been sanctioned again, Adrian’s response demonstrated how his fear of falling into crime, and his resolve not to do so, remained dominant in his thinking:

Phew, not very good, really. I mean in my head, somewhere in my head I were like “well I’m going to have to go back into crime again”...Just to survive. I’ll keep out of it though. But it’s a horrible feeling. (W1)

After three months on this sanction, Adrian explained how it was affecting him:

I’ve lost a lot of weight because of it. That’s really put me down... I’m having like one, one and a half meals a day. (W2)

Ironically, Adrian felt that sanctions made it harder for him to seek employment as he looked gaunt and unwell due to the effects of having to go without regular meals:

You’d ring them [employers] up and they’d say “oh, come down, we’ll go for an interview”. You’d go for an interview and if it’s a point where you’re being sanctioned, you’re all...skinny and everything, you look proper ill. They look at you and go “nah, you look like a crackhead or something”. (W1)

As a result of non-payment of a fine relating to his shoplifting when on a previous sanction, Adrian spent a short period of time in prison between the second and third interview. Adrian was also evicted from his housing association property due to arrears that built up when his Housing Benefit was stopped due to his sanction, and his not completing the necessary paperwork to reclaim. By the time of the third interview, Adrian was no longer on a benefit sanction and was living in the homeless hostel where he also volunteered. He had managed to stay clear of shoplifting and petty crime throughout the research period, instead relying on support from the hostel. Looking back at his experience of benefit sanctions over the time of the research, Adrian concluded:

Say my life in the last year and a half everything that's gone on, if I just take everything out that's gone on apart from the benefits, the benefits issues and just leave that there, I'd call it hell. (W3)

Adrian repeatedly emphasised how the informal support provided by the hostel had been critical in enabling him to manage, reflecting the growing role played by the charity sector in supporting claimants caught up in sanctions and benefit delays (Field et al., 2014; Lambie-Mumford, 2013):

The [hostel] helps a lot...Because I volunteer I can get my dinner there. I can take some food home and everything. But if it weren't for the [hostel] then I'd be pretty stuck. (W1)

If it weren't for the [hostel], I'd be starving right now, I'd be dead. (W2)

Although Adrian sometimes tried to appeal the sanctions that he faced, he struggled with the impersonal bureaucracy of the process:

My sanction, when they make the decision themselves, it's not the person you're speaking to, it's not even really a fair trial. What they do is they write down [their decision] and just fax it off to someone in Doncaster or Sheffield that's not even sat next to me, and then they say well sanction for a year. They're just reading it off a bit of black and white paper... 'Cause something like that, yeah, it's like the court sentencing me to a crime when I'm not there. (W2)

The contrast between the sanctions system and the criminal justice system is also highlighted by Webster, who notes that the sanctions 'penal system lacks the safeguards which protect offenders in the mainstream judicial system' (2015, unpaginated).

The experience of sanctions, in conjunction with interactions at the Job Centre which he described very negatively, hardened Adrian's resolve and determination to leave benefits behind and secure paid employment. He explained:

I don't even wanna be anywhere near the Jobcentre, I just want a job. (W3)

However, Adrian arguably needed personalised and dedicated support if he was to find paid employment, support that was not forthcoming during the time of the study (see Chapter 6). Research suggests that the most vulnerable are the most at risk from benefit sanctions (Finn and Casebourne, 2012; Griggs and Evans, 2010; Manchester CAB, 2013; Oakley, 2014; Peters and Joyce, 2006; Welfare Reform Committee, 2014). It is certainly the case that Adrian had experienced considerable disadvantage including time in care as a child, a history of offending as a teenager and young adult, and very limited educational opportunities (see Chapter 5). For Adrian, the impact of repeat sanctions was significant financial hardship – almost destitution – the loss of a permanent stable home, and a spell in custody. The stress associated with the sanctions had a negative impact on his mental health, and certainly did not assist with his efforts to find employment. Adrian's experience of sanctions fits with other research into sanctions' impact, which has repeatedly highlighted the resulting financial hardship, as well as significant negative consequences for physical and mental health (Gentleman, 2014; Griggs and Evans, 2010; Manchester CAB, 2013; Watts et al., 2014). The operation of sanctions also demonstrates the extent to which the promise of a social security 'safety net' is now being withdrawn for those judged not to be complying with the conditionality regime.

7.4.8 Perverse consequences of the conditionality regime

For Adrian, welfare conditionality and sanctions arguably operated over time to move him further away rather than closer to the paid labour market, and this was notable in a number of the participants' accounts. Isobella was on IB doing permitted work at the time of her first interview. Over the course of the research, Isobella was migrated over to ESA, and she was initially placed in the WRAG, with her benefits time limited to a year. Isobella feared that her engagement in permitted work was making her look a "soft target":

because I'm on the permitted work scheme I do worry that, merely being on it, they're going to think, "oh, she can work", and put you in that group. (DBC, W1)

Therefore, by the end of the research Isobella had taken the difficult decision to stop this employment, partially due to other health-related issues, but also partially because she wanted to do everything she could to make sure she was not

incorrectly classified as having the capability to participate in the formal labour market. In this way, Isobella's transition from IB to the more conditional ESA, and the related questioning of her eligibility for unconditional disability benefit, perversely meant that the small amount of paid employment in which she had been engaging came to an end. Evidently, this was not the policy intention, but demonstrates perhaps the complex, and sometimes unexpected, nature of responses to welfare conditionality.

Showing another aspect of the unintended consequences of conditionality, Isobella explained how she avoided contacting JCP for advice on employment as she was cautious about drawing attention to herself and so affecting her continued eligibility for disability benefits:

I do think that sometimes if you go to the Job Centre you're flagging yourself up, whether or not that's true I don't know but I'm just trying to keep my head below the parapet because I do think if you start making noises of whatever description you're going to be targeted. (DBC, W1)

James also described being resistant to engagement with the JCP programmes of work experience and training given the conditionality and compulsion that underpinned them. Instead, he preferred to access support elsewhere, through a social enterprise:

How they do it with the Job Centre is they say "right, this is a course"... it's like blackmail, "if you don't go on it you're not getting owt". But with [social enterprise] it's classed as voluntary, so if say when I started it, three days in, if I didn't want to go...I don't have to go I'm not forced to, so that's a better way round it. But with Job Centre they put that thing in your head where you think I've got to do it, I'm getting told what to do again. (YJS, W2)

Arguably, street level advisers' role as enforcers of the strict conditionality and sanctions regime can blur and undermine their role as providers of support, given that they became construed primarily as policers of eligibility. There is some research evidence of this causing a 'scarring effect' on these relationships, undermining the potential for welfare-to-work services to provide effective help and support and this was certainly evident in the case of both James and Isobella (Vegeris et al., 2011; Watts et al., 2014).

7.4.8.1 Chloe's 'welfare reform journey'

Chloe has already been highlighted as a participant who described actively choosing and preferring to stay on benefits rather than seek paid employment (see Chapter 6).

Her experiences of, and interaction with, welfare conditionality are particularly interesting, especially as she most closely fits the government's own characterisation of claimants who 'choose' a life on benefits and so need conditionality and the threat of sanctions to activate them into paid employment. At the time of her first interview, Chloe was anticipating being moved from IS onto JSA and the extra conditionality this would entail. Although not particularly keen to seek employment, Chloe seemed to accept this would be the outcome of her being placed on JSA:

You've got no choice...You're going to have to go and find a job...If they're going to send you to work, they're going to send you to work, aren't they?
(SP, W1)

Little had changed by the second interview, and Chloe was still waiting to be migrated onto JSA:

I'm a bit nervous [about the changes] but I've got no choice have I. (W2)

Just over a year later, when Chloe was interviewed a third time, she had been on JSA for a little over two months. She had immediately struggled to comply with the conditionality regime, and had missed several appointments:

They were adding more stress to me life...asking me about computers and all that. I don't know how to do it. They want me to go on courses to learn how to do it and to put my CV out there. But if you haven't worked for like, God, five or six years it's hard. It's nerve wracking to go back out to work. (W3)

Chloe's JCP adviser sanctioned her for not doing enough to seek paid employment, and failing to attend several appointments. When she found out she had been sanctioned, Chloe:

Cried. Phoned everybody possible and just tried to get it sorted out...I think I cried solid for, like, two week. I couldn't cope. (W3)

The sanction meant real hardship for Chloe and her two children:

Four to eight weeks with no money is pretty alarming when you've got kids and bills and a house to run. (W3)

By the third interview, Chloe's mental health appeared to be significantly worse than in the previous two interviews, and she now described a real struggle to cope with day-to-day life. As a result of the sanction, Chloe sought advice from a charity that had previously provided her with support following instances of domestic violence. Given Chloe's deteriorating mental health, the charity advised Chloe to put in a claim for ESA which was successful. Although Chloe's narrative perhaps suggested

someone who would be ideally suited to the conditionality regime, the various barriers she faced to paid employment, as well as her significant situational vulnerabilities (including poor mental health, history of domestic violence and periods of substance misuse) meant that it actually operationalised to push her further away from the paid labour market. There are real questions with the ethicality of sanctioning such individuals, especially given the risk of third party harm to others, most notably Chloe's two children.

7.4.9 Differentiated responses to conditionality

Exploring experiences of welfare conditionality demonstrates that it is a policy tool that is operating in ambiguous ways. Critically, at various points, some participants interpreted conditionality as having some welcome aspects, even at the same time as they also highlighted what they saw as its more problematic and less popular dimensions. There is perhaps scope to consider whether an ethical case can be made for conditionality's potential to provide an 'extra push' so that the other more negative responses can be justified. Such an exploration would need to consider the 'optimal' degree of compulsion; a review into what works internationally for single parents concluded that anything beyond a small amount of compulsion can easily become counter-productive (Millar, 2003). It would also need to consider whether conditionality provides the 'right kind of push'. Graham and McQuaid's (2014) research into single parents on JSA suggests it often fails to do so, instead wrongly pushing individuals to apply for jobs which are unsuitable, or for which they are unqualified, or to accept jobs which cannot be easily reconciled with their caring responsibilities. In this regard, the findings from the 'Welfare Conditionality' research project will be particularly interesting, given that they are tracking experiences of conditionality amongst a large number of affected individuals (Welfare Conditionality, 2015). Any exploration of the potential efficacy and ethicality of welfare conditionality should also attend to White's idea of a 'civic minimum' (2003), the pre-conditions which he argues must first be in place before conditionality can justly be imposed. As White demonstrates (White, 2004a; White, 2004b; White, 2005), these preconditions, which include guarantees that a range of contributions will be incorporated into ideas of 'work' and the need to ensure that paid employment is fairly rewarded, are not in place in contemporary Britain.

7.5 (Mis)communicating welfare reforms – provision of information from DWP and JCP

Anticipating and experiencing changes to benefit entitlement can be a time of considerable unease and anxiety and it is therefore important that encounters between claimants and street level advisers and decision makers from the DWP (whether written, in person or by telephone) are personable, timely and treat the individual claimant with dignity and respect. Arguably, this can be construed as an aspect of citizenship rights, when we incorporate procedural citizenship rights which attend to process as well as outcome (Galligan, 1992; Lister, 2004). Chapter 6 has already outlined how participants frequently experienced their interactions with JCP advisers as very negative and unhelpful, and Chapter will 8 explore the ways in which this treatment often contributes to an institutional stigma around claiming benefits.

In the context of this chapter's exploration of experiences of welfare reform, it is important briefly to explore communications from DWP and JCP relating to benefit changes and sanctions. Here, there was evidence of long delays in decision making, which left participants in an anxious, often unstable and insecure state of limbo. Official written communications were commonly described as incredibly difficult to understand, while some participants reported receiving duplicate letters and/or letters about the same matter containing contradictory information.

Sometimes written information was simply not provided. Adrian, Chloe and Robert all described finding out that they had been sanctioned when they went to withdraw their benefit money from the bank, only to find a zero balance, an issue also noted in the government's independent review into the operation of benefit sanctions (Oakley, 2014). Adrian explained the process:

You don't get no letters, you just go to the cash machine one day and it's not there and you're like "whoa, where's my money?" (YJS, W2)

Isobella described receiving duplicate and contradictory letters about her ESA, and unhelpful, and sometimes incorrect, information from DWP telephone advisers. This was something she highlighted in each of her three interviews:

With the best will in the world...they don't mean to be unhelpful, but they generally are unhelpful because they don't know themselves. And instead of saying that sometimes, they'll um and ah, and put you on the wrong track, or in fact give you the wrong information. I have been told wrong information before from them. (DBC, W3)

Isobella also repeatedly mentioned the long waits not just for information from the DWP, but also for decisions on claims and appeals, describing the waiting as unsettling but also sometimes meaning it became harder to sustain the momentum to challenge government decisions. In her last interview, she reflected back on her experiences of applying for and appealing decisions on both DLA and ESA:

It's a bit of a waiting game, which is very frustrating and upsetting because I'm no further forward. You seem to take one step forward and two steps back. And the fact that people at the DHS [referring to DWP] don't know what's going on either because obviously they're in the same situation to some extent. They don't have any information to give to people and so you just sort of end up hitting your head against a brick wall. (W3)

Participants often struggled to get through to the appropriate department on the telephone, and sometimes received unhelpful, even inappropriate, advice when they did manage to do so. In the process of appealing being placed in the WRAG, Tessa spoke to an adviser who warned her of the unlikelihood of her being transferred into the SG:

...they were so unhelpful. One person was saying "oh, you've got to have cancer to be in the support group and be terminally ill" ...they were useless...And then I got this letter and it says, "you've changed group, the benefits have changed because of evidence", but it never said what to... Then I rang up and I said [what group am I in], and she went "it says on the letter", and I went, "no, honestly"...and she were like tutting and...then she says "well it's obvious, you're in the support group" and [she] weren't very nice. (DBC, W3)

Such interactions were destabilising and upsetting, and arguably – over time – served to undermine the resilience of the participants as they continued to experience and respond to ongoing welfare reforms. The lack of information and inconsistent messages around changes to benefits operated to extend the possible negative consequences of welfare reform, particularly around the anxiety and worry which was associated with waiting to hear about changes to eligibility and entitlement. Taken together, they arguably represent a denial of the procedural rights of citizenship, rights that are increasingly important given the scale and extent of ongoing welfare reform.

7.6 The consequences of welfare reform

In collating the consequences of welfare reform highlighted by the participants in this research, the significant and continuing experience of increased anxiety, worry and stress has already been explored. A pervasive and widespread fear of the consequences of welfare reforms on individual lives was arguably heightened by the rhetorical backdrop of government and media pronouncements on the need to get 'tough' on 'welfare' and finally end 'welfare dependency'. Understandably, many participants felt targeted, with their deservingness for benefits undermined. As Cath put it:

[the government] does seem to be picking on the most vulnerable, they pick us off one at a time. That's how they get us. (DBC, W1)

7.6.1 Health impact

Inevitably, perhaps, the climate of anxiety and uncertainty around welfare reform often had a negative impact on claimants' health and wellbeing, a consistent finding from other research (Manji, 2013; Roberts and Price, 2014). In correspondence following her final interview, single parent and jobseeker Susan reported that she had been prescribed anti-depressants for the first time in her life, a decline in her mental health which she directly attributed to the stress and pressures of dealing with the welfare conditionality regime. Similarly, Isobella described how the uncertainty and anxiety around her future benefit entitlement was impacting on her health:

I have felt quite depressed with this...it's not been the best few months. (DBC, W2)

Tessa explained that stress is a particular trigger for a deterioration in her paranoid schizophrenia, meaning that both she and her psychiatrist were concerned about how the ESA migration was impacting upon her mental health:

I told my psychiatrist, "I've not heard anything [about ESA]". And she was saying "well, look, you need to keep your stress levels down"...and it does stress you out. You've got a partner who's not well, you're not well yourself every day, and you get benefit letters and if you're not careful your schizophrenia goes through the roof, your voices, your hallucinations, your paranoidias... And I don't think they [DWP] realise that. We're just a name on a page, just no one. (DBC, W2)

Tracking participants over time enabled a dynamic exploration of these health impacts, with the tentative conclusion that the cumulative and relentless nature of

welfare reform meant that – for some participants – an initially resilient and robust response to welfare reform, and the struggle to ‘get by’, was being replaced by a declining ability to cope, and worsening mental health. For example, in her first interview, Chloe explained in a fairly upbeat manner how she managed on IS:

It [benefits] just makes you plod along and gets you your essentials. (SP, W1)

By the time of her third interview, and after her migration onto JSA (see earlier discussion), Chloe described deteriorating health and difficult financial conditions:

We’re paupers, we’re so poor. It’s like we’re living in – you know where you see all these adverts – please feed our children – feed my bloody children... Me Dad asked me if I were on drugs the other day, and I said, “No.” He said I’m looking right withdrawn in face. I said, “Dad, I am stressed, you have to have money to get drugs, Dad.” So at the end of the day, no, it’s stress, can’t cope. (W3).

7.6.2 Financial impact

With regard to the financial implications of welfare reform, these were most stark where participants had been sanctioned, given the impact of being expected to manage on nil income. Since reforms such as the Bedroom Tax, abolition of the Social Fund and localisation of Council Tax Benefit were only just starting to be implemented at the time of the third interviews, participants were perhaps yet to feel some of the most substantial financial impacts of the coalition’s welfare reform programme. Given a growing awareness of the tenor and pace of welfare reform, and its overall goal significantly to reduce welfare expenditure, participants often expressed an expectation of likely future financial consequences, which sometimes led them to change their current financial management, as well as further adding to feelings of fear and unease about their futures.

At the time of the second interview, Isobella was facing the prospect of her time-limited ESA coming to an end. She described an uncertain financial future, and the steps she was taking in anticipation of this:

I have been...looking at essentials myself...food and electricity and things like that so I’m conscious that everything’s going up but my money isn’t so I will have to take some measures to cut back. Whether that be on food or putting another woolly on instead of putting the heating on. (DBC, W2)

In this study, the single parents reported difficulties in managing with the shift from weekly to fortnightly payment of IS. Given the tight margins on which single parents

managed, budgeting over a fortnight was found to be much more difficult and meant that their money often run out. Chloe explained:

It seems like I owe a lot more money out than what I did at first... I'm getting the same amount but it's harder to manage because it's fortnightly so I'm lending and borrowing more. (SP, W1)

Ever since it's gone fortnightly it's so hard. I've never been so skint in my life. I've never got any money. (W3)

Karen also struggled with the fortnightly payments, and recalled finding it easier to budget on a weekly basis:

You could manage it easier. It were like you got paid every week, you paid everything off every week. (SP, W2)

Having to stretch the budgetary period from a week to a fortnight was seen as challenging by the single parents in this study, and was associated with increased debt and financial hardship. This has been reported in other research (Peacey, 2009), and is particularly worthy of note given that Universal Credit will routinely be paid monthly to encourage claimants to get into the 'habit' of monthly money management, which the government describe as the norm for 'working families' (DWP, 2010c). In fact, many employees, particularly in low-paid sectors, are still paid weekly and fortnightly (Bennett, 2012), and participants in this study, and in other research (Tu and Ginnis, 2012), were very resistant to a future of monthly payments:

It's the worst thing you could do. I understand why they're doing it cos they're trying to get people used to monthly wages but not people on benefits. Not on what we get. (Karen, SP, W2)

In this instance, the government's reform trajectory is out of step with families' own strategies for managing to 'get by' on out-of-work benefits, with negative consequences already noted in the shift to fortnightly payments, and further negative implications anticipated should payments become monthly (Bennett, 2012; Tarr and Finn, 2012).

7.6.3 The burden of welfare reform

Chapter 5 highlighted the very real work that 'getting by' on benefits entails. Arguably, coping with, and navigating, welfare reform simply adds to this work, and involves a significant emotional burden, particularly for those who become involved in challenging and questioning official decisions. The work of living with welfare reform was particularly demanding for those who experienced repeat reassessments

for disability benefits, as well as for those who were affected by the cumulative nature of welfare reform and were hit by a range of benefit changes either simultaneously or in quick succession. In each of her three interviews, Cath was extremely anxious and low, something which she frequently linked to concern about her benefit entitlement and the possible impact of various welfare reforms. Cath spent much of the first and second interview worrying about her eligibility for ESA and DLA, concerned that she would be denied both and left with nothing. By the time of the third interview, Cath had been awarded both ESA and DLA but had now been told she could be affected by the Bedroom Tax. Cath was also aware of the planned replacement of DLA with Personal Independence Payments (PIPs), and so was concerned that her recently awarded DLA would not be available to her under the new regime:

Like I said I might have been awarded this care component benefit [DLA] but they're changing things now to take it off me. (DBC, W3)

In this way, just as anxiety over one welfare reform was temporarily resolved, another took its place, leaving Cath in a constant loop of fear, anxiety and stress.

Isobella reflected on the work and strain involved in challenging decisions over benefit eligibility:

I think this [benefits] system sometimes becomes bigger than the problem that I've got health wise because you're fighting a big system, and that's more difficult to do. It does take a lot out of you. (DBC, W2)

In addition, for some, the difficulties of coping with welfare reform led them to under-claim benefits to which they were entitled. Adrian, for example, stopped claiming JSA for a period of two to three months, due to an unwillingness (and perhaps even an inability) to continue to manage the stresses of the conditionality and sanctions regime. He explained:

It [being on benefits] was just really stressful, I just kept pulling my hair out... It wasn't helping, wasn't listening to me or anything, I was telling them what I wanted to do, but they were just pushing me in another direction, 'you need to...vac up floors and stuff', it's like, 'no that's not what I want to do, this is what I wanna do.' (YJS, W3)

Sharon was advised by the Job Centre that she might be entitled to DLA on top of the ESA that she was already claiming but she delayed putting in a claim for DLA, as she was fearful that the process of claiming would be a repeat of her difficult experience with ESA:

I dread going through [it again]...It gets me right upset. (DBC, W1)

Following input from her support worker, Sharon did eventually put in a DLA claim, and she was awarded the benefit, without having to go through an appeals process. Sharon used the additional money to pay for taxis so that she could take her three year old son to nursery, something which her agoraphobia and anxiety had previously prevented her from doing. In this example, Sharon's negative previous experiences led her to put off making her DLA claim by almost a year, and so delayed her receipt of this important support for her mental health issues.

Overall, experiences of welfare reform were associated with increased stress, anxiety and worry, which often had a negative impact on individuals' health. Financial implications were greatest amongst those who had been sanctioned, as well as for those who were dealing with a change in payment frequency. Often, what was particularly notable in the day-to-day lives of individual claimants was a combination of constancy and flux; constancy in the relentless, repetitive struggles to 'get by', and cope with (and sometimes challenge) welfare reforms; and flux and change given the backdrop of welfare reform, and ongoing and cumulative changes to benefits entitlement.

7.7 Future aspirations against a context of continuing welfare reform

7.7.1 Impact on future planning

Given the uncertainty around future benefit entitlement and eligibility, participants often explained how the ever-present backdrop of welfare reform was making it harder for them to plan for the future. Of the 15 participants followed over time, seven were best characterised as day-by-day focused individuals who found it difficult to look beyond a very immediate and short-term timeframe (see Chapter 5). The remaining eight, characterised as 'active planners', often expressed their frustrations when their attempts to plan were undermined by their lack of resources, and the wider structural barriers to making changes in their lives (see Chapters 5&6). Arguably, the experiences of welfare reform added an extra layer of insecurity and uncertainty to the already challenging context of 'getting by' on benefits, and so created a context against which made active planning less likely and less achievable. Many participants feared that the future would see their benefits end or be reduced, and so simply felt unable to implement positive changes in their lives in case these unravelled and became unsustainable when further reforms took effect. When asked what she expected to happen to her benefits in the future, Cath replied:

I expect them to take it all back off me. (DBC, W3)

Cath feared that her benefits would be reduced when she was transferred onto PIPs and/or made liable for the Bedroom Tax. This caused her real worry, and she was also reluctant to spend the extra income she had started to receive in DLA, given this fear that it would not be sustained.

James made an explicit link between the ongoing reforms and his uncertainty about his options for the future:

You're thinking, if I stay on benefits, they're making all these...cuts and stuff, you don't know what your options are. (YJS, W1)

For Chloe, even contemplating future changes to her benefits caused her to panic, and so she tried instead to concentrate upon and live very much in the present:

I try not to [think about the future] 'cause then I get all worried and then start panicking and that. (SP, W3)

Some participants explained how their previous future planning was being brought into question by their experiences of welfare reform. For example, Isobella had saved money for her retirement, money that she now feared she would have to spend due to the time limiting of her ESA:

I do have savings [but] they were meant to be for old age rainy day, not rainy day now. And certainly not to supplement [what benefit]...I'm entitled to. (DBC, W2)

The combination of uncertainties around her benefit entitlement and a feared further deterioration in her health left Isobella simply not wanting to think about the future:

I can't think about [the future] because that just depresses me because I can't envisage my situation changing dramatically for the better. And obviously if it doesn't change dramatically for the better [laughs], then the likelihood is that it's going to get worse. And that's a bit scary... (W3).

This demonstrates how the processes of welfare reform were impacting on people's ability to mobilise the future as a resource in trying to imagine a more positive future life, and hints at the reach of the negative consequences of welfare reform.

7.7.2 An uncertain (and frightening) future

When participants were asked to consider the future and, in particular, the likelihood of any further welfare reforms, there was substantial evidence of an ongoing fear and uncertainty about anticipated changes. For some, a previous period of relative stable reliance on benefits had now been replaced with what could be described as a new status quo of insecurity and uncertainty about future eligibility and levels of

benefits. For example, Tessa had been on IB without interruption for almost ten years prior to being migrated onto ESA. Then, in the course of just 18 months she was assessed twice and on one of these occasions placed in the WRAG, before appealing and being moved over to the SG. The contrast between this and her previous experiences of IB was notable, and had left her apprehensive and uncertain about the future:

They check them [benefits] more than any time in the past and... [benefits] can just be taken away...[I] try not to worry until next time they're going to check. (DBC, W3)

Most participants expected that their benefits would change again in the future, with many of the jobseekers anticipating further sanctions and a yet further intensification of the conditionality regime. It was very common to predict a harder, and more challenging future, as reflected in the following quotations:

I think they're [Job Centre] going to start coming down hard on me. (James, YJS, W2)

I expect that it [ability to manage financially] will only get worse. (Isobella, DBC, W2)

It is notable that welfare reform was interfering with, and impacting upon participants' future planning and imaginings, and this arguably demonstrates the extent of its reach and claim on individual lives.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the lived experiences of welfare reform for those directly affected by changes to the benefit system. The dynamic 'welfare reform journeys' of individual claimants have been outlined as they variously experienced and responded to changes to benefit eligibility and the extension and intensification of the conditionality and sanctions regime. Commentators on the impact of the coalition's welfare reforms have repeatedly noted that disabled people are amongst the 'hardest hit' (Patrick, 2012a; Wood, 2012), often simultaneously affected by a number of reforms, and there was certainly evidence of this in the research presented here. This research has found that the redrawing of eligibility for disability benefits is having far reaching consequences for those directly affected, who now experience persistent insecurity characterised by frequent re-assessments, and ongoing struggles to prove their deservingness and entitlement. The migration of IB claimants onto ESA represents a re-drawing of the lines of eligibility among those

judged as 'deserving' of unconditional disability benefits, those judged to be well enough to take part in work-related activity who are placed in the WRAG, and those classified as 'fit for work' who are refused ESA altogether (Dwyer et al., 2014). In this way, these changes can also be understood as a reconfiguration of the social rights of citizenship, with an ever smaller proportion of the population judged to be deserving of welfare receipt without behavioural work-related conditions attached.

An exploration of how the conditionality regime is experienced, and interpreted by claimants themselves, found an ambiguous and sometimes contradictory range of responses, with some individuals seeming to welcome the 'extra push' provided by enforceable work-related demands. At the same time, however, participants were often very resistant to the language of compulsion, and the framing of interactions between officials and themselves through the ever-present threat of sanctions. Most important were the ways in which conditionality was so often experienced as a denial of agency and individual choice, with participants unable to prioritise their own employment aspirations and/or make choices about the exact nature of the compulsory work-related activity with which they were asked to comply.

Three key conclusions can be posited about the citizenship implications of these findings. Firstly, exploring individual claimants' experiences and responses to welfare reform demonstrates – once again – how many are already 'active' and engaged in hard work (Wright, 2015), in this case related to the efforts in navigating and, so often, challenging the processes of welfare reform. The hard work of living with welfare reform adds to the evidence generated in Chapters 5 and 6 which suggests that there is a significant disjuncture between the dominant citizenship narrative – with its depiction of out-of-work benefit claimants as inactive and passive – and lived citizenship realities. These realities include individuals who are often busy and hard at work, when we understand work more broadly to include the demanding activities associated with 'getting by' on benefits in times of welfare reform.

Secondly, the coalition's welfare reforms, which continue and build upon earlier reforms by New Labour (see Chapter 3), can and arguably should be understood as a reworking and reframing of the social citizenship offer, and in particular a downgrading of the social rights of citizenship (Lister, 2011a). Redrawing the boundaries of eligibility between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' populations, and simply reducing the social welfare provided through measures such as the Bedroom Tax, abolition of the Social Fund, Council Tax Benefit and changes to rules for uprating benefit, all serve to limit that which is made available to out-of-work benefit claimants. The considerable extension in benefit sanctions, which features both a

rapid increase in their utilisation, and a marked lengthening of the maximum possible duration of sanctions, can be interpreted as a partial unravelling of the social security safety net, given that there is evidence of individuals now being forced to manage on nil income, sometimes for long periods of time (Manchester CAB, 2013; Welfare Reform Committee, 2014).

The third citizenship implication relates to policy prescription and presentation more than the lived experiences of particular reforms. Griggs and Bennett (2009) have argued that the mixed evidence on sanctions' effectiveness can lead to the conclusion that the message they convey, particularly around the need for compulsion, and the wider emphasis on individual responsibility for non-employment and poverty, is perhaps their key aim. This conclusion could be extended to the role of welfare conditionality more broadly (Newman, 2011), given that evidence on its operation is similarly mixed (Watts et al., 2014). There are real problems with a framework that places conditionality centre stage as *the* policy tool for addressing 'welfare dependency' and economic inactivity (Patrick, 2011c; Standing, 2011a; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013).

Critically, the suggestion that out-of-work claimants require incentives and sanctions implies that these mechanisms of social control are necessary to compel them to behave appropriately, in line with the rest of 'hardworking' mainstream society (Newman, 2011; Patrick, 2014a). It entails a repeated and entrenched silencing and denial of structural and demand-side barriers to individuals' engagement in the paid labour market, with the responsibility for poverty and non-employment placed with the individual claimant (Haux and Whitworth, 2014). This misattribution of individual responsibility can be damaging, undermining individuals' sense of self, and self-belief (Wright, 2015), as well as worsening relationships between those currently out-of-work and those in paid employment. The dominant narrative has significant consequences for how out-of-work benefit claimants see both themselves and others. This is the subject of the next chapter which explores stigma, shame and attitudes towards welfare reform.

Chapter 8 Stigma, shame & ‘othering’ – how benefit claimants see themselves and others, and their attitudes to welfare reform

8.1 Introduction

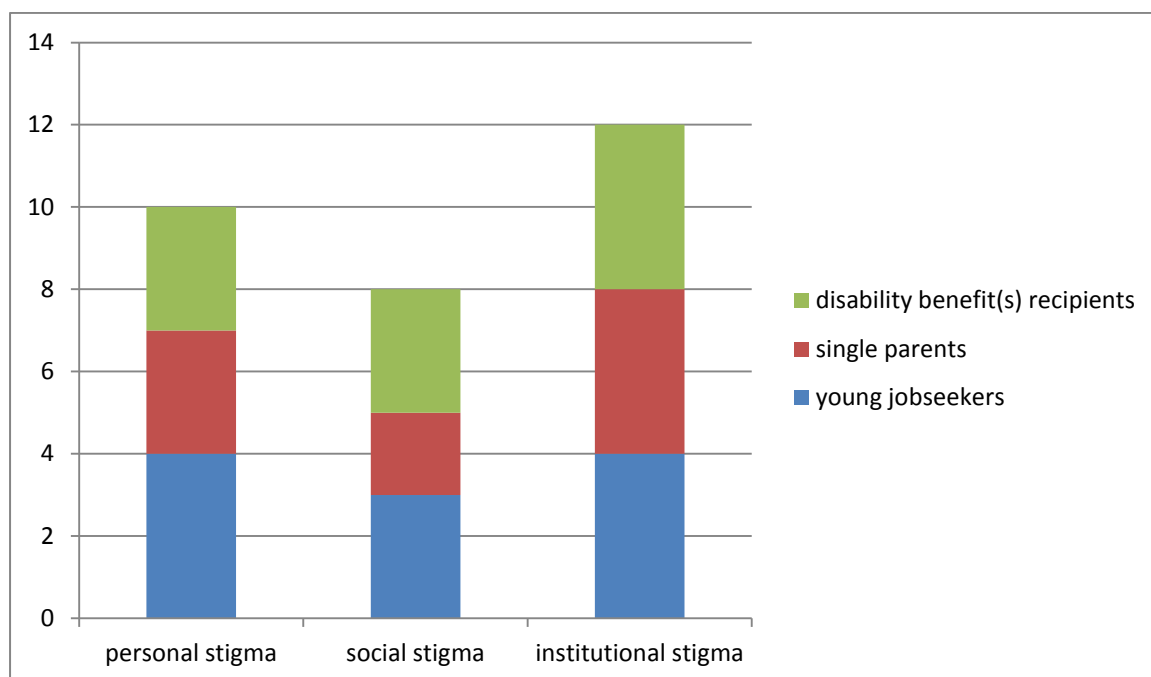
In seeking to justify and defend their programme of welfare reform, Cameron’s coalition government repeatedly contrasts the passive, inactive ‘dependency’ which they associate with reliance on benefits, with the independent and fulfilled lives of ‘hardworking families’ who ‘do the right thing’ by engaging in paid employment (cf. Cameron, 2014c; Duncan Smith, 2014d) (see Chapter 3). While this dominant narrative may be persuasive to many, it is part of a characterisation that increasingly stereotypes and stigmatises those who rely on benefits for all or most of their income (Baumberg et al., 2012; Daguerre and Etherington, 2014). Previous chapters have explored the lived reality of struggling to ‘get by’ on benefits (Chapter 5), the fluid and complex relationships between benefit receipt and paid employment (Chapter 6), and the experiences and consequences of welfare reform (Chapter 7). In this chapter, attention turns to the ways in which claimants sometimes internalise negative characterisations of benefit claimants and appropriate these dominant narratives in describing ‘others’ less deserving of support from the state.

Theorists have repeatedly emphasised the importance of thinking of poverty and social exclusion not just as states of material deprivation, but also ones with significant relational and psychological consequences and costs (Levitas, 2006; Lister, 2004; 2013; 2015a; Walker, 2014; Wright, 2015). This chapter attends to the relational dimension of out-of-work benefits reliance in particular and explores how people see both themselves and others, during a time of ongoing changes to benefit entitlement and eligibility. This relational dimension is closely bound up in ideas of citizenship inclusion and exclusion (Burchardt et al., 2002; Levitas, 2006; Lister, 2003), and is of critical importance in considering the citizenship (non)status of out-of-work benefit claimants. Following an exploration of the stigma and shame that is associated with reliance on benefits, this chapter highlights participants’ reactions to the idea frequently propagated by government ministers of benefits as a ‘lifestyle choice’ (cf. Cameron, 2012c; Osborne, 2010b). There is then a detailed exploration of the ways in which participants in this study engaged in processes of ‘othering’ to describe claimants judged undeserving of support from the state. Participants’ attitudes to welfare reform are also outlined, something which has been largely missing from research in this area to date. This chapter aims to explore claimants’ fluid and shifting identities, values and attitudes, all of which are bound up in, and shaped by, dominant narratives around ‘welfare’, deservingness and citizenship.

8.2 How benefit claimants see themselves

Baumberg et al's (2012) study of stigma and benefits describes how stigma and shame operate at three levels: the personal, social and institutional. Personal stigma is a person's 'own feeling that claiming benefits is shameful' (2012, p.5), while social stigma is the idea that others see claiming benefits as shameful. Institutional stigma refers to the shame and stigma attached to the processes of claiming benefits (2012). As Baumberg et al (2012) and Walker (2014) note, these three categories are closely related and are often difficult to disentangle because, for example, experiences of social and institutional stigma often feed into, and directly contribute towards, personal stigma. In this study, rather than thinking of them as separate categories, they are understood more as dimensions of an overarching experience of stigma. Useful in trying to better understand the drivers behind stigma, they are employed here in an effort to map participants' experiences and understanding of the stigma(s) they faced. Following Baumberg et al (2012), feeling ashamed to claim benefits because of the belief that others stigmatise benefit receipt will be understood as part of social stigma. This section explores personal, social and institutional stigma in turn. The chart below outlines the spread of stigma experiences across the longitudinal sample. It shows that the majority of participants made reference to experiences of all three dimensions of stigma, with institutional stigma particularly pervasive (experienced by 12 of 15 followed longitudinally).

Figure 24 Experiences of the stigma of benefits – LSMP



8.2.1 Personal stigma

While Baumberg et al's (2012) study found that personal stigma was not particularly widespread, in this research there was substantial evidence of people critiquing their own benefit reliance, closely mirroring the conclusions of Walker et al's cross-national study regarding the 'shame' of poverty's pervasive reach (Walker, 2014; Walker et al., 2013). In contrasting the different findings from these three studies, it may be that the methods utilised by Baumberg et al - surveys and focus groups with claimants - were less likely to provide a space for individuals to share their experiences of seeing their own benefit reliance as shameful. In the study reported here, semi-structured interviews provided a safe space in which the majority of participants followed longitudinally (10 of the 15) described living with the personal stigma of benefits reliance.

Participants frequently tied their feelings of shame around benefits reliance to the lived realities of 'getting by' on benefits. Particularly negative associations were attached to having to 'go without', occasional engagement in criminal activity such as shoplifting, and being unable to participate in social events and family celebrations (see Chapter 5). There were signs of an internalisation and – perhaps – partial acceptance of the social stigma of benefit reliance, with participants sometimes

appropriating the derogatory words associated with benefit reliance to describe themselves:

I feel like a bum. I feel useless. When you're walking around the streets... everybody knows that you're not a worker because you're out and about through the day so you feel worthless... You feel like some people are looking at you as if to say "fucking, he's taking piss, he's another one that just sits about and does nowt". And then when you go shopping and you're having to buy all the cheapo stuff, you feel, I don't know, you feel ashamed. That's how it is. You see people putting nice products in their trolleys and you can't, you've got to get the minimum and it's tough if you like it or not because that's all you can afford. (James, YJS, W1)

In this quotation, James describes how his own negative feelings about his benefit reliance are themselves bound up in his assumptions about how other people perceive and judge him, evidence of the close links between the personal and social stigma of benefits. Interestingly, though, James explained earlier in the interview that he had no direct experience of being treated differently due to his benefit reliance, suggesting that it was perhaps his own negative feelings about being on benefits that he was projecting onto an expectation that others would also be critical of him. Certainly, he described being embarrassed about being on benefits, and the material deprivation this inevitably entailed:

It can be embarrassing [being on benefits]. Your friends can be going out for a drink but [you] can't go...so then you feel embarrassed because people know that you can't go because you've no money. (W1)

In James' narrative, there is evidence of a stigma of poverty and benefits tied to the material manifestations of poverty; what having to do without means, and how it visibly excludes and differentiates affected individuals from mainstream society. At the same time, James' describes his non-work as contributing to a feeling of worthlessness, suggesting a particular stigma around economic inactivity, and non-engagement in the paid labour market.

There was also evidence of individuals describing the shame and stigma of their reliance on benefits, with negative associations around being reliant on the state, which some participants self-described as 'scrounging'. Young jobseeker Sam showed a particular replication of dominant narratives, and described feeling as if she was a 'scrounger' in two of her three interviews. Sam's narrative was notable, in that her characterisation of herself as a 'scrounger' emerged over time, and seemed to correspond with her transition from IS onto JSA, and into the world of job search

and Job Centres, again showing how the different dimensions of stigma intersect. When first interviewed, Sam was a recent care leaver who had just secured an independent home. She was at full-time college and hoping to find employment in the future in IT, and was in the process of being moved onto JSA. In this first interview, Sam made no reference to 'scrounging'. By the time of the second and third interviews, Sam had left college and was trying – without success – to find paid employment. It was at this point that Sam began to characterise her situation as 'scrounging':

I feel a bit weird when it comes to the jobseekers bit because I don't like scrounging off of people...I don't like scrounging money. (YJS, W2)

I need a job; because I'm sick of scrounging. That's how I think of it, anyway, I'm sick of scrounging. (W3)

When the interviewer asked if she had felt like she was scrounging when she was on IS, Sam reflected upon her growing understanding of her identity as a 'scrounger':

[Before] maybe because I was a teenager and I didn't see it like that but now I've got more awareness that [benefits] come from the government. That's how I see that I'm scrounging money really. (W2)

Sam highlighted how her own shame about her benefit receipt was itself tied to dominant portrayals of benefit claimants on programmes such as Jeremy Kyle, with these portrayals impacting upon how she felt about herself:

This is random but Jeremy Kyle, people going and spending money on drugs and stuff like that, and he keeps complaining about "oh, so it's tax payers' money that's paying for all your drugs and this and that and the other", which kind of makes me feel a bit ashamed, even though I don't do it. So like I say, onto a job and then I can get that feeling of being ashamed off me and then I'm all right then...

Interviewer: So why do feel ashamed if it's not you that's doing it?

I don't know, it's kind of a difficult feeling to explain. Even though I'm not doing it, it's 'cause I'm on Jobseekers as well as them... (YJS, W3)

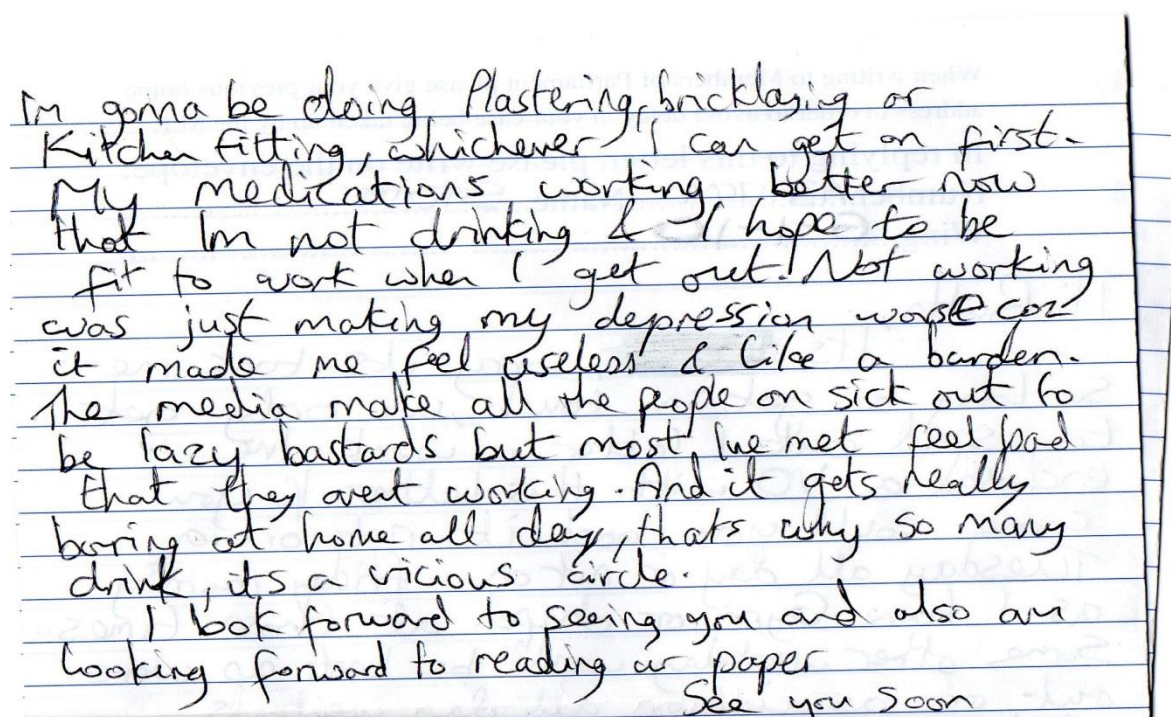
Sam conceptualised a future move into paid employment as having the potential to "get that feeling of being ashamed off me", and so her experiences of the shame and stigma of benefit receipt contributed towards her motivations to enter employment. Over time, as Sam continued to vocalise her experience of personal stigma, she arguably demonstrated the extent to which benefits reliance can cause psychological and relational harm, as well as material hardship.

There is no doubt that participants' negative feelings around benefit receipt fed into and directly contributed to broader negative assessments of self, which were damaging to self-esteem and emotional wellbeing. In Kane's third interview, which took place in prison, where Kane was serving a custodial sentence, he reflected on his previous spell on disability benefits:

Being sat at home doing nowt, and your self-esteem, it doesn't do much good for your self-esteem, you feel useless. (DBC, W3)

An extract from a letter Kane sent from prison is reproduced below, with Kane's permission. It highlights how Kane described a personal stigma of benefit receipt, with him feeling "useless" and "like a burden". Importantly, Kane also places emphasis on negative media portrayals of benefit claimants. In this extract, it is notable that Kane suggests that the negative associations he attached to his benefit receipt actually contributed to a worsening in his mental health.

Figure 25 Extract from letter to researcher from Kane



I'm gonna be doing Plastering, bricklaying or
Kitchen fitting, whichever I can get on first.
My medications working better now
that I'm not drinking & I hope to be
fit to work when I get out. Not working
was just making my depression worse coz
it made me feel useless & like a burden.
The media make all the people on sick out to
be lazy bastards but most we met feel bad
that they aren't working. And it gets really
boring at home all day, that's why so many
drink, it's a vicious circle.
I look forward to seeing you and also am
looking forward to reading ur paper
See you soon

Like Kane, Cath also described her reliance on benefits as unwelcome and in all three of her interviews Cath explicitly equated making a claim for DLA with "begging". In her first interview, she explained how filling in the claim forms makes "you feel like you're begging" (DBC), while when she was awarded the benefit she

reflected: “I’d like to be working...it is begging [being on benefits]” (W3). Cath anticipated that she would continue to feel negatively about her benefit reliance for as long as she remained dependent upon state support:

If I stay on benefits for the rest of my life then it’s going to affect me for the rest of my life. It’s going to keep me down, and a feeling of worthlessness as a human being. Like my life’s not worth anything but theirs [the government’s] and their families’ lives are. (W1)

Arguably, for some, such as Cath, being on ‘benefits’ has become a by-word for a whole range of negative experiences and circumstances, which are all connected in some ways with reliance on benefits and the poverty that entails. These include being economically inactive, seeing oneself in a negative light as ‘welfare dependant’, as well as the material manifestations of poverty, and the resultant societal exclusion. Arguably, those who experience the personal stigma of benefits could be described as behaving as a ‘non-reflexive-constrained-agent’ (Hoggett, 2001) (see Chapter 1), given their relative powerlessness and appropriation of the negative associations of benefit reliance. Indeed, even though participants recognised the structural barriers they faced in trying to secure paid employment, and their own deservingness of benefits (see Chapters 5&6), they still frequently self-identified as ‘scroungers’, hinting either at a non-reflexivity, or simply an inability to overcome the powerful central narrative.

8.2.1.1 Dynamic experiences of personal stigma

In following participants over time, it was possible to observe how changes in employment status affected their experiences of personal stigma, with some participants welcoming the loss of stigma that they associated with a move from out-of-work benefits to paid employment. This was particularly notable in the account of Rosie, who started the research in receipt of out-of-work benefits but who had just secured full-time employment by the time of her third, final interview (see Chapter 6). In this, Rosie reflected back on her experiences on out-of-work benefits:

I’ve been poorly through depression every time I’ve been on benefits, because my mum and dad have worked hard all their lives to be where they are now, so that’s the impression I get, that you need to work hard and earn your money. (SP, W3)

Benefits just isn’t for me at all. I don’t think I’ve got the mind set to be lazy because it’d just make me feel depressed. Some people don’t mind being on benefits and watching TV or doing their own thing all the time and I just couldn’t live like that anymore, so things are definitely better. (W3)

These quotations suggest that Rosie felt as if she was a failure when she was reliant on out-of-work benefits, while she also seems to be associating benefit reliance with passivity, and even 'laziness'. Arguably, they also show the extent to which the dominant narrative around 'welfare dependency' as inherently negative is being internalised by individuals, in ways that are perhaps indicative of a wider shift from conditionality to conditioning, whereby individuals self-regulate and critique their own non-working behaviours (see Chapter 10).

Rosie contrasted this sense of failure, and the depression she also experienced, with her changed situation on the cusp of secure, full-time employment:

When you work for your money it's a lot different to receiving benefits, because you kind of feel better to spend that money because you've earned it. (W3)

In this way, Rosie's intersecting 'welfare' and employment journeys illustrated the dynamic nature of the personal stigma around benefits, as well as the value attached to paid employment as a means of shedding such stigma.

8.2.2 Social stigma

It is important to now explore how and in what ways participants felt that others see claiming benefits as shameful; the social dimension of benefits stigma. Obviously, these subjective perspectives are themselves framed and interpreted through the lens of individuals' own attitudes to their benefits reliance and so are closely connected to personal stigma.

Interestingly, many participants appeared to understand, and even accept, what they perceived as people's antipathy towards benefit claimants:

I think a lot of people who work do resent people who are on benefits 'cause it's like they're getting a chunk out of their wage...getting put into the system for the benefits...I'd probably feel the same. (Sharon, DBC, W3)

A lot of people don't like paying their taxes and it's going towards somebody who's not doing anything...[and] I do tend to agree... (Josh, YJS, W3)

At the same time as being accepting of resentment towards benefit claimants, participants also spoke of the impact of the 'social stigma' of benefits on their own lives, highlighting interactions with members of the public and shop staff and consequences for familial relations. When asked if she ever felt that she was treated differently by people because she was on benefits, Amy responded:

Sometimes I think, yeah. Get looked down on sometimes and things like that. Thinking I'm not worth nothing sometimes. (DBC, W1)

Karen was also very conscious of the social stigma of benefits reliance, highlighting the role social media increasingly plays in constructing and circulating critiques of out-of-work benefit claimants (Jensen, 2014; Tyler, 2014c):

A lot of people just slag us [people on benefits] off. Like we don't work, we don't need to work 'cause we get paid for it and I want to work. I want to get off benefits but it's hard.

Interviewer: when you say people slag you off do you mean like to your face or...

No, it's all over Facebook like "oh, look at people on benefits, they get everything". But we don't. (SP, W1)

Importantly, Karen's narrative shows how she resisted these negative characterisations of claimants, rebutting the ideas of generous benefits payments, and the notion that she did not want to enter paid employment. She described how she felt the shame and stigma of being a benefit claimant and single parent in her everyday interactions:

People stare at you in the street like you're summat they stood on. I think it's just wrong. (W1)

Josh explained that people in his social circle, particularly his friends, sometimes commented on his benefits reliance:

There's people always commenting on the fact that I'm on benefits. I mean one person I actually fell out with, he called me a dosser and all that because [of me] being on jobseeker's and he had a job. And he were showing off about it, he were just trying to put me down because the way he put it was, I was scrounging off the government which I feel is true but... I don't see there's any way I can do anything at the moment ... (YJS, W1)

Three of the participants – Amy, Cath and Jessica – explained that they sometimes felt excluded within their families as benefit claimants whose poverty meant they could not participate in family celebrations, and whose benefit reliance was perhaps shameful where it deviated from the family 'norm'. When asked if she felt being on benefits affected the way she was treated, Cath answered:

Yeah, of course it does. In my own family...I've had things like "how long you been on benefits now, Cath?" across a room. (DBC, W1)

The fact that such a question was interpreted by Cath as an attempt to differentiate her from the rest of her family, even to stigmatise her, demonstrates the extent to which benefit reliance is now mired in negative associations, and bound up in feelings of stigma and shame.

8.2.2.1 Multiple stigmas

It was common for some participants in this study to face double, and even triple stigmas, due to their identities not just as 'benefit claimants' but also as single parents and/or disabled people. Rosie explained how she felt stigmatised as a single parent in social housing:

I don't think you get treated differently [on benefits] but I think that you're put into a category. I think you're kind of stereotyped into 'single mum on benefits', just by a lot of people. Having your own house with a little child and [they] think that it's all free and you've got this house free, and it's not like that. (Rosie, SP, W1)

The stigma around being a single parent was highlighted by Sharon, who also had to manage stigmas around her mental health issues as well as her benefit receipt:

I think single mums are quite looked down at. (Sharon, SP, W2)

Several of the disabled participants spoke of the stigma attached to disability, particularly to mental illness:

Even if you're just speaking to somebody and you say "oh, I'm on benefits", especially if you say you're on disability money...If you tell somebody that you're poorly and that you've been in and out of hospital.... you can tell that they're sort of like; "weirdo, weirdo". (Jessica, DBC, W1)

Later in the same interview, Jessica continued:

Even if I'm just walking about town I do sort of feel lower than everybody else, not as privileged. Because obviously being on benefits and having an illness you're sort of stuck. (W1)

Jessica's narrative demonstrates the harm and distress that can be caused when people internalise stigmas around disability and benefits, with inevitable consequences for feelings of exclusion from wider society.

8.2.3 Institutional stigma

Alongside experiences of personal and social stigma, there was widespread evidence of the institutional stigma attached to claiming benefits, with participants frequently describing processes and interactions which were dehumanising and

alienating, findings which are reinforced by other research (Baumberg et al., 2012; Chase and Walker, 2013; Graham et al., 2014). The relations between benefit claimants and officials associated with the welfare state has already been explored in some detail (see Chapter 6), but it should be noted that the process of claiming benefits was imbued with stigma and shame.

Participants repeatedly described encounters with JCP and WP advisers as being characterised by judgemental and disrespectful treatment, with a notable absence of respect highlighted in many interactions. Sophie described a run-in between herself and her lone parent adviser:

[I was] talking to lone parents adviser and one of the kids were doing something and I think he said “can’t you tell your kid to shut up and sit down, or something”. I went “listen, you want me down here to do the interview, so I’ve come down”. I said and “please don’t talk to my child like that” cos he was like proper short...I said “look I’m here trying to look for work”. [he said] “Yeah right”, or something like that. He were really clever, and he went “can you leave the building please”. I went “yeah, that’s fine love, okay.” (SP, W3)

Sophie also explained how she felt her advisers did not believe she was really looking for paid employment, something highlighted by several participants:

[Job Centre staff] do look down at you...last week when I went down, she went, “have you applied for any jobs?” I went “yeah, 23”. And she looked at me as if to say “right okay, whatever”...basically they look at us like rubbish ‘cause we are on benefits...it’s like they put you in a category or something...like low-lifes or something like that. It does get you mad. (Sophie, SP, W3)

[The staff] think we don’t try but if you saw...If I showed you, my emails on the computer is full of [applications]...But when you go [to job centre] they think you’re not trying, and that’s the only thing that maybe stresses me out. (Susan, SP, W2)

Participants frequently felt judged and criticised by Job Centre staff, and these interactions only added to their feeling of being stigmatised and stereotyped as benefit claimants, a finding which corresponds with existing research (Garthwaite, 2014; Graham and McQuaid, 2014; Hussain and Silver, 2014; Norman et al., 2010; Shildrick et al., 2012b; Whitworth, 2013).

Interestingly, Robert described how he felt a JCP adviser’s treatment towards him changed once she realised he was actually engaged in some part-time employment,

with the suggestion that he became more deserving and less stigmatised once his status as a 'worker' was realised:

She started getting snotty with me... Basically [saying] get off your arse and find jobs. So I said to her... "are you going to give me the form so I can do my hours?" [to record paid work], right, and she turned around and she goes "oh, do you work?" and her tune changed then. (YJS, W1)

Participants sometimes explicitly picked up on the dehumanising nature of the claims process, with James reflecting:

You're just another number, you're not a person. That's how I feel about it [being on benefits]. (YJS, W3)

Cath and Isobella both highlighted the impact of the security guards present at Job Centres:

When I started to go in the Job Centre again there were guards. Security men, and I'm thinking what a thing... It's wordless, It's a silent, oh, I don't even have the words. It's the image... They're symbolising the fact that they're the big superpower and we are powerless and we've got to do as we're told, when we're told. (Cath, DBC, W1)

I assumed perhaps to some extent, obviously erroneously, that [the job centre] was an office that wanted to help you... [but] of course, you've just sort of got burly security guards patrolling up and down, and you just think, what do they think I'm going to do? Pull out a gun? (Isobella, DBC, W3)

Importantly, processes of welfare reform, and changes to benefit entitlement were sometimes experienced as deepening and extending the reach of this institutional stigma, particularly around the questioning of eligibility that the reforms so often entail. Terri described how she felt targeted by the ESA reforms:

It makes me feel as if I've been singled out... as somebody that has no medical problems. (DBC, W1)

Isobella repeatedly explained how she was uneasy about claiming benefits, as she believed she ought to be able to manage on her own, and so found the constant struggle for entitlement especially difficult to sustain:

I was always brought up that... you paid your own way so that's the other thing that I find is difficult as well, especially with the questionnaires that you have to fill in, because I feel I shouldn't be having to fill them in, because I should be able to manage. Of course, I can't. So that is also something else that

wars with me and again a lot of confidence I think is lost because I feel almost as if I'm saying "oh please give me something", instead of saying "look I'm entitled to this" so I think that can have a big impact. (W2)

In Isobella's account, we see how her personal stigma around claiming benefits is only reinforced and intensified by the demands of a benefits claiming process that requires her to complete lengthy forms as part of an effort to 'prove' her own entitlement. In this way, the personal and institutional dimensions of stigma operate together to entrench and deepen her feelings of shame and stigma. Isobella had to manage this stigma at the same time as facing an ongoing struggle to demonstrate her eligibility for disability benefits, with the stigma adding to the emotional strain she already faced (see Chapter 7).

Research into street level advisers' own attitudes and experiences of supporting out-of-work claimants has found many do subscribe to the idea of a 'dependency culture', an attitude that of course starkly clashes with the lived experiences described in this research (Dunn, 2013; Dunn, 2014). Significantly, though, if advisers commonly hold negative attitudes towards the claimants that they see – their 'customers' - this will impact and govern these encounters, in ways that may well not be beneficial for the prospects of meaningful support being provided or effective communications established.

At present, the Job Centre, described by Lammy (2014, unpaginated) as a 'bastion of green and yellow-branded stigma' primarily serves to further entrench the exclusion of out-of-work benefit claimants, through treatment and practices that leave individuals feeling stigmatised, shamed and stereotyped as second-class citizens. Evidently, there are risks that these processes, and the overlapping (and intertwined) stigmas will lead some people to under-claim benefits to which they are entitled, and there is evidence of this both in this research and in the wider literature (Baumberg et al., 2012; Garthwaite, 2014; Shildrick et al., 2012b) (see Chapter 7).

8.2.4 Managing and deflecting stigma

Under-claiming benefits to which one is entitled is one way to manage and seek to deflect the stigma associated with benefit reliance. In this research, there were also examples of people seeking to 'pass' as non-benefit claimants, concealing their stigmatised identity, a classic strategy for managing stigma (Goffman, 1990; Tyler, 2013; 2014b) and one which has been noted in other research (Baumberg et al., 2012; Smith, 2005). Tessa, who was living with paranoid schizophrenia, described how she preferred not to disclose either her impairment or her benefit reliance:

I don't tell anyone I'm on benefits, apart from me close mates and stuff...Well I don't tell them about me illness 'cause everyone reacts wrongly when they hear schizophrenia...people do judge, if you're on benefits and stuff. (DBC, W2)

Perhaps reflective of active agency, which is best characterised as sitting midway between Lister's (2004) typology quadrants of everyday 'getting (back) at' and strategic 'getting organised', there were also limited forms of resistance, with some participants challenging the stigma and negative associations of benefit reliance. For example, Susan, when relating negative treatment by Job Centre staff, challenged what she experienced as the dehumanising processes of benefit claiming:

I might be on benefits but I'm also a human being. (SP, W2)

In a different vein, Sophie repeatedly questioned the characterisation of benefit claimants as passive by emphasising the hard work associated with being a single parent:

[The government] just think that we [single parents] sit at home on our backsides all day. They don't realise the cooking, the cleaning, looking after the kids and that lot. That's a full time job in itself I think. (SP, W2)

There were also examples of people who appeared to feel less able to challenge the stigma, and instead spoke of simply trying not to think about it, as in the case of Adrian:

People are full of assumptions and judgments. I've come to realise that recently a lot and it sickens me and it gets me angry to be honest. I just try and block it out. (YJS, W3)

This research reinforces findings from other studies about the pervasive and far reaching stigma and shame associated with benefit receipt and the poverty this so often entails (Batty and Flint, 2013; Garthwaite, 2014; Graham et al., 2014; Macmillan, 2003; McManus et al., 2012; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Walker, 2014; Wright, 2015). It should be noted that this stigma is reserved for the receipt of social 'welfare', with occupational and fiscal welfare not attracting any such stigma or shame, a pertinent example of the enduring relevance of Titmuss's Social Division of Welfare thesis (Mann, 2009; Sinfield, 1978; Titmuss, 1958).

In exploring the consequences of the stigma around benefits, a recent survey of out-of-work benefit claimants (*Who Benefits?*, 2014) found that 38% said that their confidence and self-esteem were harmed by worrying about what others think of them, while 31% felt their mental health was adversely affected by this worry.

Certainly, exploring the stigma faced by out-of-work benefit claimants in this study has demonstrated the extent to which people are internalising negative characterisations of 'welfare dependency' in ways that are profoundly damaging to self-esteem, self-confidence and self-worth, and which hint at the psychological and relational harm caused by poverty and social exclusion. It also suggests the ways in which today's out-of-work claimants are now conditioned to view their own benefits reliance negatively, possibly undermining the logic for conditionality (see Chapter 10). The very fact that people think of their benefit reliance in such negative terms serves as yet another counter to the notion popularised by the government and the media of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice' (Walker, 2014).

8.2.5 Are benefits ever a 'lifestyle choice'?

In seeking to justify and defend a tightening of welfare conditionality and a reduction in the real value of many benefits, the government has repeatedly returned to the idea of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice'. Speaking at his first Conservative Party Conference as Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne (2010b) argued that for too many benefits had become a 'lifestyle choice', while David Cameron has asked: "Why has it become acceptable for many people to choose a life on benefits?" (2012c). The suggestion that some people 'choose' benefits also provides an inherent justification for measures seeking to compel out-of-work benefit claimants to prepare for paid employment, with enforcement required to persuade individuals to make a better 'choice' by finding a job. While this narrative may provide a justification for the government's welfare reform approach, it is not one that seems to be supported by empirical evidence, at least in the research reported here. Most of the research participants scoffed at the idea of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice'; commonly employing strong negative language to describe the reality of life on benefits. Sophie and Susan explicitly countered the idea of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice':

People don't choose to live on benefits – it's not our choice. It's just the way that things have happened. We don't choose to live on benefits, we don't want to live on benefits. Sophie, SP, W1)

I wouldn't opt for [benefits] if I had a choice...because one, you're perceived like a scrounger...and secondly, there are things you can't do because that's the only money you have. (Susan, SP, W3)

All of the participants explained that they saw their own reliance on benefits not as a 'lifestyle choice', but as a necessity, given their individual circumstances (see

Chapter 5). Several of the participants actually questioned whether it was possible to have a 'life' on benefits:

It [benefits] ain't a life choice, you don't want to be living like that. It's like a pigeon, innit, you're just there pick pick pick, and that's it really. You're just existing. (Dan, DBC, W1)

[On benefits]...you're just existing, not living. That's all you're doing. (James, YJS, W3)

You can't really have a lifestyle on benefits...Me, being on benefits, I don't really have a life...If someone is on benefits then what life is that? That's not a real life, really, you're just wasting away slowly. (Josh, YJS, W1)

Significantly, though, while participants did not see the notion of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice' as having meaning for themselves, they did often see it as applying to some 'other', and it is to an exploration of this 'othering', arguably the primary mechanism utilised by participants to try to manage and deflect the shame of benefit reliance, that this chapter now turns.

8.3 How benefit claimants see others

8.3.1 A note on context – a new moral consensus?

In this research, participants consistently described some 'other' who did regard benefits as a 'lifestyle choice', and whose deservingness of benefits was questionable. There is a growing body of literature illustrating the 'othering' in which people in poverty engage, whereby they emphasise the non-deservingness of some 'other' while – very often – simultaneously defending their own entitlement to benefits (Batty and Flint, 2013; Chase and Walker, 2013; Clark, 2014; Garthwaite, 2014; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Walker, 2014; Watt, 2006). This 'othering' needs to be considered against a backdrop of increased and enduring hostility towards benefit claimants, both in the popular media and in government rhetoric (see Chapter 3). This thesis has frequently quoted from government ministers who use stereotyping, derogatory and (de)moralising language to describe and arguably caricature out-of-work benefit claimants. These rhetorical statements, which can themselves be understood as technologies of social control (Tyler, 2014a), have become deeply embedded in popular consciousness. Over recent years, public attitudes to out-of-work benefit claimants have hardened with an increasing emphasis on individuals' responsibility, and even blame, for their own poverty (Bamfield and Horton, 2009; Hall et al., 2014; Taylor-Gooby, 2015; Valentine, 2014).

Animosity towards benefit claimants is itself built upon dichotomous divisions and 'othering' (Lister, 2004; 2008), which seeks to make real and give meaning to distinctions between 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants'. In this imagining, those living in poverty and reliant on out-of-work benefits are conceptualised as 'other' by politicians, popular media and much of the public (Lister, 2015). Arguably, given that public attitudes, mainstream media representations and the majority of politicians now seen united in seeing 'welfare' as inherently negative and problematic (Pykett, 2014), it is possible to speak of the emergence of a new moral consensus on 'welfare'. This consensus is centred around a critique of 'welfare dependency', a valorisation of paid employment, and frequent recourse to easy (if simplistic) divisions between 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants' (see Chapters 3&10). Benefit claimants live within and experience the consequences of this moral consensus, which inevitably impacts upon how they see themselves, are seen by others, and - of course - how they see *others*. In making sense of 'othering' by benefit claimants, we must first recognise both the 'othering' they themselves are subjected to (Lister, 2004; Lister, 2008) and the new moral consensus on 'welfare' which frames their daily lives.

8.3.2 'Othering'

The matrix below demonstrates the widespread extent of the participants' engagement in 'othering', by illustrating the categories which each participant identified in their discussions of who was undeserving of benefits. People frequently spoke about the undeservingness of immigrants, those with substance misuse issues, fraudulent disability benefit claimants, and those with no previous employment experience. Immigrants came in for frequent censure, and there was often significant anger about what was seen as the government's continued support for immigrants, which was sometimes explicitly contrasted with their apparent lack of support for British out-of-work benefit claimants. This was particularly notable in Chloe's narrative, and featured in each of her three interviews:

I'm doing this basically all by myself on what they give me and it's ridiculous. And then there's people like Zara next door and she's from a different country, she's from Pakistan and she's a lovely, lovely woman but she gets free gas, free electric and Home Office pay her shopping. She gets everything for nowt, and they still get money [too]. (SP, W1)

Figure 26 Categories of ‘othering’ evident amongst participants – LSMP

		Immigrants	Substance misusers	‘Fraudulent’ disability benefit claimants	Single parents	Examples of Inter-generational worklessness	Those with no previous employment experience	Those who ‘choose’ benefits	Fraudulent claimants (in general)
Jobseekers	James	•			•			•	
	Adrian		•	•					
	Sam		•	•				•	•
	Robert		•				•		
	Josh	•		•					•
Single parents	Susan			•		•		•	
	Chloe	•	•	•				•	
	Sophie		•		•	•		•	
	Karen			•				•	
	Rosie	•		•					•
Disabled people	Sharon	•		•				•	
	Tessa			•					•
	Isobella			•		•	•	•	
	Kane	•	•	•					
	Cath		•						

There were clear correlations between individual participants’ own benefit claiming identity, and those whom they identified as being undeserving, with evidence that participants were implicitly seeking to shore up their own deservingness by critiquing and ‘othering’ those who were unable to display the same characteristics as

themselves. For example, both Robert and Isobella highlighted their previous working experiences as a justification for their own deservingness of benefits and then suggested that 'others' who had never worked were less entitled to the same social welfare. As Robert explained:

If you haven't put nowt into country you shouldn't get nowt off country. Like I still pay me tax on [stewarding job]...(YJS, W3)

In addition, those who were themselves disabled were particularly likely to talk of undeserving disability benefit claimants who were not *really* disabled. This could be linked to efforts by disabled people to distance themselves from 'others' who do not deserve disability benefits, and to mitigate the effects of the increased hostility towards much of the disability benefit population. Sharon was 'offended' when she received a questionnaire to reassess her eligibility for disability benefits, and became upset when she situated this reassessment against what she saw as a broader context of undeserving 'others':

There's so many people out there that are just lazy and don't want to work and they...won't get questioned and sent to [ATOS]. They'll just get left. And there's people out there that are on disability that don't deserve it. I mean I've seen a man a couple of weeks ago that was on disability and had a disability badge and everything, and he was just walking normal and swinging his walking stick about like it was nowt. And I thought there's people there that actually really deserve it that could do with the money, and they're not even getting it and it just winds me up. (DBC, W2)

There is the possibility that welfare reform will only extend 'othering', as individuals who find their own benefit eligibility questioned become increasingly resentful about the 'deservingness' of others. Several participants highlighted how they felt that, with benefit changes, 'deserving' benefit claimants were being punished for the behaviour of those who were not behaving as they should. As Susan put it:

People who need help...are punished by those who just want to abuse the system. (SP, W2)

Participants commonly drew on personal experiences to illustrate their accounts, describing people they knew of, whether directly or through hearsay and word of mouth, who engaged in behaviours which were seen as 'undeserving' and morally questionable:

I know a few people who take Mcat and Ket [drugs] and they're just sat there off their faces day in, day out, and they're on Jobseekers so they lie and cheat

and everything about what they're doing and it really annoys me. (Josh, YJS, W3)

I've met quite a few people who claim to have bad backs, and go to medicals with a zimmer frame, and then next day you see them riding a bike. Some people will try it on really. (Kane, DBC, W2)

In differentiating between the undeserving 'them' and the deserving 'us' it was common to make a broad distinction between those who 'choose' benefits, or who were to 'blame' for their own situation, and those who were reliant on benefits due to factors beyond their control such as impairments, unemployment, and caring responsibilities. In making this distinction, participants commonly re-emphasised their own lack of choice over their situation, as well as highlighting that many did actively choose to stay on out-of-work benefits and so accepting the 'benefits as lifestyle choice' rhetoric when applied to some 'other'. Sometimes the contrast drawn was explicit:

Some people choose it [benefits], some people think 'I'll have a kid and go on benefits and that'll be me'. Some people are used to it, but I'm not. Well, I never have been. (James, YJS, W1)

By employing 'othering' in this way, participants were asserting 'bad-people-exist-but-I'm-not-one-of-them', something which Kingfisher (1996) observed in a study of USA female welfare recipients (cited in Garthwaite, 2014).

8.3.3 Understanding 'othering'

The 'othering' in which participants were engaged was part of an effort to resist and challenge being judged and condemned as part of a homogenous group of out-of-work benefit claimants. In their accounts, participants described a resistance to politicians' tendency to generalise about the benefit claiming population:

[David Cameron] puts us all into that category which is wrong because there are people like myself that are looking for work, that want to go back to work. We don't want to just sit at home and do nothing. Obviously, where on the other hand there is people that do sit at home and do nothing, and they're happy with that. (Sophie, SP, W3)

They shouldn't tarnish us all with the same brush. We're all individuals, they should look at people as individuals instead of putting us all in that same 'oh, they're on jobseekers category', so it's like you're all useless. And that's how they look at you. (James, YJS, W1)

Participants also highlighted the dominant portrayals of benefit claimants in the media, and sometimes made an explicit link between these portrayals and the ways they themselves were treated. Sophie described how programmes such as *The Fairy Jobmother* were giving benefit claimants a 'bad name':

They [participants on *Fairy Jobmother*] all sit down and they don't want to do this and they don't want to do that and it gives other people that are on benefits a really bad name. 'Oh you scruffy little scroungers', it's not easy you know. We wouldn't be on it if we had a choice. (SP, W2)

Participants' awareness of these negative portrayals, and their own recreation and utilisation of them via 'othering' are arguably part of their broader acceptance of the new moral consensus on welfare. By 'othering', participants implicitly suggest that the dominant portrayals and stereotypes are correct, but simply do not apply in their own individual cases. Ironically, by becoming active participants in a process of circulating ideas of (un)deservingness and (ir)responsible behaviours, claimants are actually furthering their own exclusion from society, even as their efforts are firmly orientated around demonstrating their own 'deservingness'. (Chase and Walker, 2013). Arguably, though, the absence of resources and the structural barriers faced by out-of-work claimants, when combined with the power and purchase of the current hostility towards out-of-work claimants, make a more sustained challenge to the overarching narrative simply unfeasible.

For out-of-work benefit claimants, 'othering' serves as an attempt to distance themselves from society's negative and condemnatory gaze, by delineating and creating separations between 'us' and 'them', the deserving and undeserving. Protestations of one's own deservingness where – as so frequently was the case – married to a critique of the undeservingness of others are also arguably a strategy for attempting to retain some dignity and respect for one's own position against the groundswell of negative characterisations-of out-of-work benefit claimants. By critiquing the behaviours of an 'other', and then contrasting these behaviours with one's own deservingness, participants are engaging in 'identity work', with their 'othering' a resistance to the dominant narrative and a (not always successful) effort to distance oneself from a negative societal view and instead construct a more positive identity (Elliott, 2005; Ronai and Cross, 1998). In this way, the 'othering' of benefit claimants *by* benefit claimants is part of a broader effort to deflect the stigma and shame associated with benefit reliance (Garthwaite, 2015).

This links closely with a small but growing body of research (Batty and Flint, 2013; Chase and Walker, 2013; Garthwaite, 2015; Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013; Walker,

2014) which relates 'othering' to efforts to manage the shame of poverty, with those judged to have a lower social or moral status providing an 'alibi for one's own circumstances' (Chase and Walker, 2013, p.14). It is important to recognise the classed element of 'othering', with Shildrick and MacDonald suggesting that the demonization and prejudice shown towards Britain's white working class creates a climate where the poorest in society *have* to 'imagine there [are]...others below them' (2013, p.299). The extent to which a politicised working-class consciousness and political movement is today largely absent shapes out-of-work benefit claimants' experiences and opportunities, and arguably makes a defensive, reactive recourse to 'othering' more likely (Shildrick and MacDonald, 2013).

'Othering' occurs alongside what must sometimes feel like a struggle for limited resources, resources that are being increasingly withdrawn and made conditional on behaviours and assessments of 'deservingness' as part of processes of welfare reform (Patrick, 2014a; Wright, 2015). Set against this context, 'othering' also needs to be understood as part of claim-making, which emphasises one's own entitlement to social welfare by means of undermining the rights of an 'other'. 'Othering' can then be recognised as an aspect of 'getting by' on benefits (Lister, 2004), and even as a form of, admittedly very defensive, citizenship engagement (Ellison, 2000).

8.3.4 Constructing positive moral identities in difficult times

For most participants in this study 'othering' was employed as a defensive strategy to create a positive identity, by explicitly distancing oneself from the dominant narratives on 'welfare', and shifting the focus onto a less deserving, more blameworthy 'other'. However, there were also limited signs of resistance to this 'othering' and attempts to perhaps carve out a more inclusive and challenging form of claim making that highlighted the 'deservingness' of most, if not all, benefit claimants. This could be seen as an explicit challenge to the dominant narrative, and in particular a rejection of the new moral consensus on welfare. This was most notable in the accounts of Cath and Isobella, with both also being the only participants who were critical of some of the behaviours and treatment of the 'undeserving' rich. Cath was critical of rich 'undeserving' benefit claimants, reserving particular censure for British pensioners living abroad and yet still claiming their Winter Fuel Payments:

I think if your belly's full, put your plate down, get your finger out of the bowl.
(DBC, W3)

In discussing the 'deservingness' of benefit claimants, Cath highlighted how there are 'undeserving' people in every walk of life, a more inclusive approach than the more common 'them' and 'us' dichotomy:

I believe, in all walks of life [there are] people swinging the lead. (DBC, W2)

Isobella made a link between the 'undeserving' behaviours of the poor and the rich, arguing:

I'm willing to conceive that there's an awful lot of people claiming benefits that perhaps shouldn't like there's a lot of bankers claiming bonuses who shouldn't. (DBC, W2)

Interestingly, Cath and Isobella were also the most vocal in their resistance to the government's welfare reform agenda, showing a clear link between their rejection of both the dominant narrative, and the reforms for which this narrative arguably provides a justification. Cath described welfare reform as 'abandoning' disabled people and suggested that it increased the social stigma of benefits:

[The government is] just abandoning us and making us feel and look through media and television and all these speeches that they've got like we're all playing rugby on Sunday but we're filling in forms in and saying that we can't walk far. And it's not like that. (DBC, W1)

Isobella repeatedly mentioned that she preferred to call benefits 'entitlements', arguing that this better reflected that they were deserved and needed, rather than being conceptualised as a gift or 'treat':

I don't like the word benefit actually. I'd like to call it entitlement because I do think I'm entitled. A benefit to me is something that you have as an add on and is almost like a bit of a treat. So I don't see Incapacity, or the money that comes through as a treat. It's actually what I'm due because I've paid in for 200 years all my National Insurance... (DBC, W1)

In Cath and Isobella's accounts, we are arguably seeing an attempt to construct an alternative narrative about benefit claimants' deservingness and ongoing rights to social welfare. This narrative is potentially inclusive and contributes to their own attempt to create and sustain positive moral identities as benefit claimants who are entitled to, and need, support. While Cath and Isobella challenged aspects of the government's welfare reform approach, it was notable that – for most participants in the study – they were receptive to the need for changes to the benefits system. This was arguably closely related to their own buy-in to a new moral consensus on welfare, and reproduction of its central elements through the 'othering' in which they

engaged. This chapter now moves on to explore attitudes to welfare reform in some detail, exploring the links between ‘othering’ and the attitudes discernible.

8.4 Attitudes towards welfare reform

8.4.1 Supporting the direction of reform

We hear a great deal about the hardening of attitudes to benefit claimants in general, and there is – as always – close attention to public attitudes towards the government and its policy approach (Bamfield and Horton, 2009; Baumberg, 2014; Hall et al., 2014; Taylor-Gooby, 2015; Valentine, 2014). However, there has been a relative absence of research which directly explores the attitudes towards welfare reform of those directly affected by the changes taking place. As part of this study’s focus on the lived experiences of welfare reform, it was important to explore participants’ attitudes to the welfare reforms, and any changes in these attitudes over time, as the reforms took effect. In this exploration, it is notable how far these attitudes are themselves shaped by not just participants’ own experiences of welfare reform but also – critically – their implicit co-option into the terms of a new moral consensus, as already demonstrated by the ‘othering’ in which they engaged.

Many of the participants in this research were, in fact, quite supportive of the central tenets and underlying principles of welfare reform, even though they were often very critical of their direct application to their individual case. Indeed, of the 15 participants followed longitudinally nine expressed some agreement with aspects of the welfare reform approach. Arguably, what is evident in this seemingly contradictory position is the impact and reach of ‘othering’. It is possible that ‘processes of othering’ provide a rationale for the overarching direction of welfare reform – namely an effort to activate the ‘irresponsible’, and make sure that the ‘choice’ of benefits is no longer available to those judged not to deserve or ‘need’ state support (Cameron, 2010d; Duncan Smith, 2010a; DWP, 2010c). Sometimes the link was explicit in people’s accounts:

There is quite a lot of people faking having bad backs and stuff. So I think [the government have] got to do something really. (Kane, DBC, W1)

In some ways [welfare reform] is a good idea because maybe there is people who don’t need to be on certain benefits that could go out to work. Not like me but people that are just playing on it or something to get money out of the social. (Amy, DBC, W1)

In these narratives, individuals' own continued deservingness is emphasised, just as 'others' undeservingness is conceptualised as providing a justification for welfare reform.

8.4.2 Fluctuating attitudes towards reform

Sometimes individuals' attitudes to welfare reform seemed fluctuating and unstable. This could be linked to participants' conflicting perspectives as both observers of the benefits system as a whole and as individuals who were targeted by some of the changes. Adrian's views on the reforms fluctuated over time. In the first interview, he suggested that the reforms were necessary and needed:

I think what they're doing is right. Everybody should have a job: the government's right really. (YJS, W1)

But, in his second interview, he took a very different approach:

Everything the government's doing at the moment is ridiculous. (YJS, W2)

Adrian's position as both an advocate for welfare reforms targeted at 'others', and an individual adversely affected by the changes perhaps explains his fluctuating and sometimes contradictory opinions.

Over time, there was also some evidence of support for welfare reform weakening, something which often occurred in tandem with the realisation that these reforms were causing significant hardship and difficulties for many, not least the participants themselves. This was particularly noticeable in the case of Isobella, who while critical of the pace of change, and its perceived targeting of many 'deserving' groups, did initially see some potential in the welfare reforms being introduced:

I suspect there are lots of people who probably could go to work who are on something like Incapacity Benefit but on the other hand I think there are vastly more people who do need it who can't work. And so I think they're sort of being penalised for the fact there are some people who don't [deserve benefits], perhaps because in the past governments have been lax and the legislation hasn't been tight enough, or the claims have been, less strong. (DBC, W1)

However, over time, as Isobella saw her own entitlement to benefit questioned, she started to rethink her attitudes to the government's approach, becoming increasingly angry:

I've got probably worse at feeling angry at what they're doing. (W2)

I am far more critical of the [government] of what they've done...and the problems that they've put people through. (W3)

8.4.3 Attitudes towards conditionality and compulsion

The coalition follows its predecessors in office in presiding over an extension and intensification of welfare conditionality, with reforms including new conditions, harsher sanctions, and a widening of the reach of conditionality to yet more of the population of out-of-work benefit claimants (Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Dwyer and Wright, 2014) (see Chapter 3). In this research, attitudes towards conditionality and compulsion were explored. In the first and third interviews, participants were presented with three vignettes which described the application of work-related conditionality to a single parent, young jobseeker and disabled person (for vignettes, see Appendix Four). While altered between the first and third interviews to change small details, the vignettes were kept broadly the same, so that they could serve as a rough proxy to explore whether attitudes to conditionality changed during the course of the study. This exercise demonstrated that people's positions broadly stayed the same over time, with support for compulsion notable amongst around half of the participants. Participants' responses to the vignettes were collated into a matrix (see below) to highlight which impositions of conditionality were assessed as being justifiable and fair. This matrix shows that every participant could conceive of certain circumstances where conditionality was seen as justified, with even those articulating greatest opposition, such as Cath, feeling that its application to a young jobseeker could sometimes be socially just.

Overall, and perhaps surprisingly, there was most support for conditionality being applied to a single parent, with this often justified with recourse to paternalist and contractualist arguments. People were generally positive about conditionality's appropriateness for young jobseekers, although there was some resistance to the lack of choice that the tightened conditionality regime could entail (particularly around demands that people take part in work experience programmes in areas where they might have no interest). People were most resistant to conditionality being applied to disabled people, with most participants concerned that this would cause substantial hardship and make individuals' impairments and health conditions worse. Participants often characterised the application of conditionality to a disabled person as based on a flawed assessment of capability. In the instances where views were more favourable, these were themselves conditional and rested on a questioning of whether the disabled person in the vignette was 'genuinely' disabled or instead, perhaps, 'fit for work' with conditionality then deemed appropriate. This questioning of whether the disabled person in the vignettes was

Figure 27 Spread of assessment of vignettes and applications of conditionality as broadly fair - LSMP

		Jobseeker (w1)	Jobseeker (W3)	Single Parent (W1)	Single Parent (W3)	Disabled person (W1)	Disabled person (W3)
Jobseekers	James	•	•	•	•	•	•
	Adrian			•	•		
	Sam			•	•		
	Robert				•	•	•
	Josh	•		•	•		
Single parents	Susan			•	•		
	Chloe	•					
	Sophie	•	•	•	•		
	Rosie			•	•		
Disabled people	Sharon	•	•		•		
	Tessa	•	•	•	•		
	Isobella	•					
	Kane		•	•	•		
	Cath	•					

really disabled reflects growing public distrust and hostility towards disabled benefit claimants, with many disabled people reporting feeling that their eligibility to benefits is increasingly questioned and undermined by the wider public, as well as by government (Scope, 2011; Tyler, 2014c; Walker, 2012; Wood, 2012). Across the different categories of participants, it was young jobseekers who were most likely to

think that imposing conditionality was broadly fair, this despite their being the group most likely to experience work-related conditionality first-hand.

In their discussions about the vignettes, participants tended to engage in a consideration of the individual circumstances of the claimant in question, an assessment and exploration of their 'behaviour', and their 'deservingness'. There was comparatively little evidence of a broader questioning of the whole premise of attaching conditions to benefit receipt.

Chloe felt that it was fair for a young person to be compelled to take part in Mandatory Work Activity:

'Cause he's a boy, he's nineteen year old and he should go out to work...If I had a full-time partner and I lived with him I'd expect him to [work]...He's a young lad on his own. Get out to work you lazy little shit [laughs] (SP, W1)

James defended conditionality's applicability to a single parent whose children were both at primary school:

She could get a part-time job within them [school] hours. Ten till two or owt like that...I understand it would be hard for...but she should look for summat. (YJS, W3)

In this way, it seemed that, perhaps through familiarity and repeated imposition, the overarching conditionality framework had become largely accepted and viewed as mainly unproblematic. Many shared Sharon's perspective that:

If people refuse to work take their benefits off them, cos then they've got no choice but to work...And then if they do start looking for work put them back on [benefits]. (DBC, W1)

Some even called for conditionality to be extended further, with Josh arguing:

I think a lot of support is offered to people that should be forced more than anything. Make them get help, make them get back into work, make them do this and that. (YJS, W3)

At the same time, however, there was limited evidence of challenges to the conditionality approach, particularly around the absence of choice this often entailed, as well as an awareness that it is operating as a form of social control:

[Claimants] shouldn't be forced to do anything. That's just control, just wanting to control you. (Adrian, YJS, W2)

Cath disliked the idea that the government could compel single parents to seek paid employment, even where the parents wanted to prioritise their parenting:

If a woman wants to bring her own children up...who are they to say that they can't? It's not on. (DBC, W3)

8.4.4 Theoretical defences of conditionality

In defending the application of conditionality, politicians frequently drew on contractualist, paternalist and new communitarian arguments, as well as making regular recourse to the underclass thesis ((2002; Deacon, 2004; Patrick, 2011b). Mapping these theoretical defences onto the perspectives articulated by the participants in this study, it is possible to see how these ideas are interpreted and understood by those directly affected by welfare conditionality. In their descriptions of people who 'choose' benefits, participants frequently drew on ideas of intergenerational cultures of worklessness, depicting big families with 'lazy' adult members, who would rather sit around all day than enter paid employment. This depiction fits ideas of an underclass and has close correspondence with some of the harshest government rhetoric.

There are people that abuse the system...A home where you find a grandmother, then the daughter then grandchildren all sat...from morning watching TV and even buying booze on that money and all sorts...These parents are not even telling their children to go out and work. (Susan, SP, W1)

I know there is people that pop out kids left, right and centre cause they think they're gonna get the money for it. (Sharon, DBC, W3)

Ideas of an underclass are often tied into justifications for welfare conditionality that emphasise a role for paternalism, as in Mead's argument that the poor are 'dutiful but defeated' (Mead, 1992, p.122) and require compulsion if they are to be encouraged, supported, but ultimately compelled, to do the right thing. In this study, participants often seemed to be supportive of paternalist, conditional interventions, particularly when applied to young people with little previous working experience and no other caring responsibilities or commitments. In the vignettes based on a young jobseeker, there was an exploration of young men being compelled to participate in mandatory work experience programmes, with the threat of benefit sanctions designed to engineer continued engagement (see Appendix Four). Participants often drew on paternalist arguments to support the application of welfare conditionality in this instance:

I can't see that being a bad thing because he's got no kids. He's only young and...cleaning the streets and tidying up graffiti...There's nowt wrong with that and it will help him get into the work ethic. (Cath, DBC, W1)

At the end of the day he's a young lad, what else is he going to do? What's he doing, sat at home, smoking weed, drinking, chilling out on the street corners...He's a young lad needs kicked up the arse. (Sophie, SP, W1)

Arguably, the most popular and oft-used defence of welfare conditionality in government accounts is welfare contractualism, the now familiar 'something for something' refrain (Conservatives, 2010b; Department for Social Security, 1998; Duncan Smith, 2010a) (see Chapter 2). Again, the notion of welfare contractualism had meaning for participants, and was in evidence in their discussions around welfare conditionality. Indeed, there was direct evidence of support for the idea of tying social rights to social responsibilities:

No one should really get it [benefits] free handed. (Sophie, SP, W3)

If people aren't willing to look for jobs then why should they be allowed to get money for nothing? (Josh, YJS, W1)

However, it was perhaps applied more critically, with a particular interest in questions of the rights of the claimant under any such 'contract' and whether and how far the government was fulfilling its side of the bargain. Participants also questioned whether some of the work-related conditions were just; for example requirements to work voluntarily in order to gain work experience, or to travel long distances for a job. Dissatisfaction with the support provided by the government, particularly around the promised help to enter and sustain paid employment, was frequently articulated, as was the enduring issue of an absence of jobs, which made fulfilling the duties under the welfare contract more difficult (see Chapter 6). Reflecting on negative experiences in his mandatory engagement with the Work Programme, and perhaps hinting at the power imbalance implicit in any 'welfare contract' (Patrick, 2011b; White, 2003), James drew on contractualist arguments:

If you don't go [appointments], if I don't stick to my part of arrangement, I lose me benefits, but if they don't stick to their part of the arrangement, it's like, "So what?" (YJS, W3)

The final theoretical defence of conditionality, communitarianism, suggests that the duty to enter paid employment should be understood to arise independently of government intervention (Deacon, 2005; Etzioni, 1997). Many of the participants did speak of the responsibility to work, with this tied to the central aspiration of the large majority of the sample to make the transition into paid employment, where this was feasible and sustainable (see Chapters 5&6). At the same time, however, some participants took an alternative approach, instead emphasising what they felt should

be the right to paid employment, a right that they identified as being absent in the contemporary context.

There shouldn't be benefits in the first place, people should have a job.
(Adrian, YJS, W1)

The articulation of a right to paid employment is evidence of a challenge to the dominant government narrative, resting as it does on solidaristic and social democratic ideas. It turns the corrective lens to the demand-side of the labour market, rather than welfare conditionality's lop-sided focus on the steps individual claimants need to take to become more employable and job ready (2011b; Patrick, 2011c).

Taken as a whole, what was notable from this research was the extent of support for the government's overarching narrative of welfare reform – an account of separating out the 'deserving' from 'undeserving' and instilling fairness in the benefit system which had clear meaning and purchase for most of the participants. The government's behavioural reading of fairness, expressed most clearly in Cameron's conference statement that 'fairness means giving people what they deserve - and what people deserve can depend on how they behave' (Cameron, 2010d, unpaginated), was widely accepted. Participants were most likely to engage in a questioning of whether particular individuals or categories of claimants were 'deserving' or exhibiting 'good' behaviour, with little evidence of a broader challenge to the tying of benefit entitlement to behaviour. Linked to this, participants were largely in agreement with an approach that privileges paid employment as the primary responsibility of the dutiful citizen, although they did often also mention demand-side barriers which could make fulfilment of this duty more difficult (see Chapter 6). Arguably, participants' support for welfare reform was founded upon the widespread 'othering' in which they were engaged, an 'othering' which created a readymade target group for the government's reforms.

8.4.5 Political (dis)engagement

Hoggett's (2001) modified typology of agency and reflexivity (see Chapter 1) suggests that it can be possible to be a 'reflexive-constrained-agent', where you have little power in your situation and hence relatively little opportunity to exercise agency, but are reflexively aware of the situation in which you find yourself. Hoggett (2001) warns of the consequences of being in this position, of a reflexive helplessness, which can easily lead into anger, depression and despair. Arguably, with regard to their experiences of welfare reform, many of the participants were operating within the 'reflexive-constrained-agent' quadrant of Hoggett's modified

typology, where they were relatively unable to change their circumstances, and yet were understanding of the broader processes that were operating upon them, and causing them hardship. Similarly, in engaging in 'othering', a reflexive act orientated around justifying and defending one's own eligibility, participants could be seen to be operating as 'reflexive-constrained-agents', given their relative powerlessness to change and challenge the overarching moral consensus on 'welfare'. In this way, and when contrasted with the more 'non-reflexive' behaviours evident in internalisations of the stigma and shame of benefit reliance, we can see out-of-work benefit claimants operating within different axes of Hoggett's agency and rationality typology at different times, and in different contexts, highlighting the fluid and dynamic nature of agency and reflexivity for those living on out-of-work benefits.

While participants were often supportive of the broader welfare reform policy agenda, they were often very angry and resistant to the application of conditionality, compulsion and benefit changes to themselves, an anger which was often expressed in their political disengagement. This anger was particularly apparent in threats of violence against the government, empty threats that perhaps illustrated their powerlessness in the face of the reforms:

I think everyone [in government], all of them want shooting in the head.
(Chloe, SP, W3)

[Cameron's] another one that needs a machete...[What he says] make me want to go round and put my hands actually round his neck or shake him.
(Isobella, W3)

There was widespread distrust and dislike for politicians evident. As Terri put it:

I don't have any faith in any of them [politicians] because they're all alike. They say this, that and the other to get in and when it comes to the stick and lift, they don't deliver what they say. (DBC, W1)

Participants described politicians' lives as far removed from, and out of touch with, the everyday lived experiences of struggling to 'get by' on benefits during times of welfare reform, a common criticism of politicians by those living in poverty (Perry et al., 2014; Roberts and Price, 2014). Isobella felt politicians:

haven't got a clue how people live. I don't know what planet they're on. (DBC, W2)

Indeed, in demarcating 'them' and 'us' and 'othering', participants also engaged in an 'othering' of politicians and powerful actors, who were conceptualised as making decisions with little regard or care for the negative impact they might have on

individual lives. People spoke of the need for politicians to experience the lived realities of benefit reliance if they were to develop more effective policy. Responding to a quote from David Cameron about the need to change the benefits system, Cath suggested:

Tell him “walk a year in my shoes” and then we’ll talk about this statement that you’ve just made. (DBC, W1)

Similarly, Karen reflected on politicians who:

‘aven’t lived in our shoes. It’s easy enough to judge. (SP, W1)

There was very little evidence of political participation amongst the sample, with nine of the 15 who were followed longitudinally not registered to vote, a finding which reflects the nationally low rates of formal political participation amongst those living in poverty (Flinders, 2014; The Electoral Commission, 2005). When describing why they did not vote, participants frequently mentioned that they saw it as a pointless action, which had no capacity to engineer positive change:

I don’t even vote. I don’t think it’s worth it. (Chloe, SP, W1)

Whoever I vote for, the country’s going to the dogs anyway, so I don’t bother. (Sam, YJS, W3)

Participants spoke of being marginalised from the political process, while also feeling that their views and opinions were neither valued nor sought by officials and decision makers, reflecting the extent of their exclusion from mainstream political engagement. When asked whether there had been a time in the past two years when someone at the DWP, JCP or another official had been interested in their views on an issue, not a single participant said yes, hinting at the extent of this disenfranchisement. It was common to greet this question with laughter, as if the very idea of officials being interested in their views was comical. In Susan’s response to this question, she laughed, saying:

I haven’t even tried because I’d probably think, hmm, who cares? (SP, W3)

Overall, then, it was clear from this research that while participants were very angry and resistant to the way in which the government’s reforms were affecting their lives, this did not directly translate into political engagement, or broader challenges to the socio-economic context. In her exploration of the agency of people living in poverty, Lister (2004) points to the agency entailed in attempts to ‘get organised’ in efforts to challenge the status quo. Lister observes that this is only rarely in evidence, reminding us that ‘proud to be poor is not a banner around which many are likely to march’ (2004, p.152). Arguably, the stigma and shame of poverty makes any

attempt to 'get organised' less likely, while the efforts and resources required simply to 'get by' also leave individuals with little scope to do so. Perhaps most importantly, however, the defensive 'othering' in which participants have been shown to be engaged also creates division and antipathy amongst those in arguably quite similar social positions, divisions which make any collective challenge a very unlikely prospect (Chase and Walker, 2013; Clark, 2014; Walker, 2014). The disjuncture between individual resistance to welfare reform affecting oneself and broader support for welfare reform when targeted at some 'other' is arguably a manifestation of these processes, a manifestation which serves the government well in mitigating a sustained political challenge to their welfare reforms by those who are directly affected.

Nonetheless, there have been limited signs of groups uniting in opposition to aspects of the government's welfare reform agenda, particularly evident amongst disability benefit claimants (cf. Gentleman, 2011; McVeigh, 2011; Tyler, 2014c). It is also notable that when, following completion of the fieldwork, participants were given the opportunity to become engaged in a film project to disseminate this research, a large number were enthusiastic, with seven sustaining engagement throughout the course of the project (Dole Animators, 2013) (see Chapter 4). This engagement, and that of others living in poverty in the UK (ATD Fourth World, 2014; NICE, 2014; Poverty Truth Commission, 2011) suggests that when resources are made available and opportunities emerge to give voice to one's own experiences in a safe and confidential environment, and then to disseminate these experiences nationally, there is an appetite for 'getting organised' to articulate an alternative narrative on the lived realities of welfare reform.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the relational dimension of lived experiences of welfare reform, exploring how benefit claimants see themselves and their identity as out-of-work benefit claimants. While there was substantive evidence of the shame and stigma associated with poverty and benefit reliance, most clearly noted through a replication of the 'scrounger narrative', participants also rejected the labelling of their benefit reliance as a 'lifestyle choice'. Although the notion of people 'choosing' 'welfare dependency' was described as having no meaning for the participants themselves, it was seen to be applicable to an 'other', varying sub-groups and categories of claimants who were judged to be largely undeserving of state support. Arguably, this 'othering' is evidence of an increased acceptance of a new moral consensus on 'welfare'. Furthermore, in both their internalisation of a stigma and

shame around benefits reliance, and their active participation in 'othering', participants could be described as acting as 'conditioned' citizens, whereby they accept and appropriate aspects of the dominant citizenship narrative (see Chapter 10). Importantly, participants' 'othering' was linked to their attitudes to welfare reform; attitudes that were arguably more positive than their direct experiences of the reforms might lead one to expect. Participants were overwhelmingly disenchanted with the political process, with frequent expressions of anger towards the political class, who were characterised as cut off from and ignorant of the everyday lived realities of poverty and what 'getting by' on benefits actually entailed. Indeed, political leaders could be described as the other 'other', this time located at the top of the power hierarchy, but similarly subject to resentment and critique.

In reflecting on the implications of this chapter's central findings, it is notable how far the dominant framing of out-of-work benefit claimants as inactive, passive and – all too often – responsible for their own non-work and poverty impacts upon how out-of-work claimants see themselves, see others, and are seen by others. What this shows is the reach and power of this dominant framing, with the 'individualisation of the social' (Ferge, 1997) it involves providing scope for the government to justify and defend its programme of welfare reform, with this justification having purchase and meaning for out-of-work benefit claimants themselves. Furthermore, the enduring power of divisions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' populations, now reinvigorated by the government and opposition's emphasis on 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants' and 'strivers' and 'shirkers', is also much in evidence (Patrick, 2013a). These dualistic, dichotomous divisions, while hard to sustain when held up against lived reality (Garthwaite, 2011; Patrick, 2013b; 2014b; Shildrick et al., 2012b), do considerable rhetorical work in providing a framework to demarcate and distinguish between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' behaviours and populations. A, perhaps illusory, notion of choice is given primacy, with deserving and undeserving demarcations rotating around a non-choice/choice axis, as those seen to be 'choosing' benefits are classified as least deserving, with a residual category of 'victims' of bad luck and circumstance judged deserving.

Given that out-of-work claimants themselves operationalise divisions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' populations, and make use of these divisions to defend their own entitlement and question the entitlement of 'others', these narratives arguably pose a real threat to wider forms of political engagement and social solidarity, and limit potential scope for collective challenges to the status quo (Chase and Walker, 2013). Evidently, of course, these divisions also further entrench the exclusive potential of social citizenship (Lister, 2008; Lister, 2013), with those

deemed 'undeserving' granted a lesser, devalued citizenship status. It is possible to conceptualise the political class as active agents in the production and re-production of stigmatising narratives around benefit claimants and poverty (Patrick, 2013b; Tyler, 2014c). When this is married to the evidence that benefit claimants are internalising this stigma, which directly feeds into their desires and motivations to make the transition from benefits into employment, the (re)production of stigma can be understood as a deliberate strategy of social control (Tyler, 2014c), what Tyler tentatively calls the 'stigma doctrine' (2014b). Arguably, this strategy, while effective in undermining the 'social rights' of citizenship, is counter-productive in terms of assisting the welfare-to-work effort, due to the corrosive effects of this stigmatisation on affected individuals' self-esteem, self-confidence and mental health.

Taken as a whole, there is no doubt that examining the relational dimension of poverty and the lived experiences of welfare reform illustrates the exclusive potential of social citizenship. Participants in this study demonstrated how the stigma and shame they experienced contributed to feelings of exclusion, with an allied lack of resources also making it difficult, if not impossible, to engage fully in society. Examining experiences of stigma and benefit receipt against a theoretical backdrop of social citizenship demonstrates the ways in which such stigma arguably operates to create a division between those who are treated as citizens, and those granted a lesser, second class citizenship status. As Walker argues:

...stigma divides, creating a social fault line between 'the poor' and the 'non-poor', the benefit recipient and the taxpayer (2014, p.64).

This fault line is also a fault line between those denied and those granted full citizenship status, illustrating the power of stigma and the damage it causes.

Some contemporary citizenship theorists have argued that social citizenship is best understood as being based in engagement, in 'acts of citizenship' (Isin, 2008). But out-of-work benefit claimants often face barriers to such engagement, barriers linked to the stigma they experience, as well as an absence of money, time, respect and self-confidence, all vital pre-conditions to sustained citizenship engagement (Ferragina et al., 2013). The stigma and shame of poverty and benefits delegitimise the lives of those who experience it (Lister, 2013), and arguably mean that their citizenship status is, at best, one of second-class citizen.

Chapter 9 Aspirations and achieving change – reflections on diverse journeys

9.1 Introduction

Having explored participants' attitudes towards their own and others' benefit receipt as well as their perspectives on welfare reform (Chapter 8), it is now important to turn to a summary of their positions at the end of the study. This brief chapter focuses first on exploring how far and whether participants had managed to realise the aspirations and hopes for the future which they articulated at the beginning of the research (see Chapter 5). It then considers the dynamic and intersecting journeys of the participants, drawing out three case studies that variously demonstrate positive change, constancy, and a downward trajectory. This analysis aims to discuss how far and whether participants made positive changes in their lives during the time of research, outlining the ways in which both the presence and absence of change were interpreted and rationalised by individual participants.

9.2 Aspirations for change

The table below outlines the aspirations expressed by each of the participants followed longitudinally in their first and second interviews, highlighting whether these aspirations were wholly or partially achieved during the research study. Although several of the sample did realise their aspirations to secure paid employment, it is notable that only one, Rosie, made a transition into what was, hopefully, permanent employment. Non-employment aspirations which were achieved included James's wish to move house, and Tessa's desire to lose weight, part of her efforts to better manage her health issues and impairments. Cath also achieved her aspiration to secure additional income, following a successful DLA appeal at a tribunal (discussed in Chapter 7). As discussed earlier (see Chapter 5), it is notable that for ten of the participants their aspirations were firmly anchored around movements off benefits and into paid employment.

Table 5 Participants' aspirations - LSMP

		Aspiration(s)	Achieved? (Yes (Y); No (N); Partial (P)	Details
Young jobseekers	Adrian	Get off benefits	N	
	James	Move house Find work	P	Moved house
	Josh	Find work	P	Found work, but not sustained
	Robert	Find work	P	Found work, but not sustained
	Sam	Find work	N	
Disability benefit(s) recipients	Cath	Find voluntary work Get a little extra money	P	Got extra money via DLA award
	Kane	Find work	N	
	Isobella	Health not to deteriorate Benefits situation to stay same	N	
	Sharon	Move house	N	
	Tessa	Lose weight	Y	Lost weight
Single parents	Chloe	Move house	N	
	Karen	Find work	Unknown	No interview W3
	Rosie	Move house Find work	P	Found work
	Sophie	Get off benefits	P	Found work, but not sustained
	Susan	Get off benefits	N	

In their seminal study of poverty dynamics, Leisering and Leibfried (1999) develop a typology of three different categories of benefit claimants, categorised according to how they subjectively interpret and rationalise their own reliance on benefits over time. Firstly, 'subjective bridgers' are those who rely on benefits but see this as a short-term necessity. This includes some long-term claimants who still see their claiming as having a predictable end; for example single parents who plan to leave benefits when their children reach a certain age. 'Unsuccessful bridgers' are those who want their reliance on benefits to be temporary, but prove unable to make the transition off benefits. Finally 'longer-term claimants' are those who demonstrate some acceptance of their dependence on benefits over the longer-term, and are most likely to envisage a future which includes ongoing reliance on benefits. Using the typology, and reflecting back on the experiences of the 15 participants followed longitudinally it is possible to segment the sample into these categories (see table below).

Table 6 Leisering and Leibfried's typology - LSMP

Subjective bridgers	Unsuccessful bridgers	Longer-term claimants
Rosie (SP)	Adrian (YJS)	Tessa (DBC)
Sophie (SP)	Sam (YJS)	Isobella (DBC)
Josh (YJS)	James (YJS)	Sharon (DBC)
Robert (YJS)	Kane (DBC)	Cath (DBC)
	Susan (SP)	Chloe (SP)
		Karen (SP)

This table shows a fairly even spread across the three groups, with a discernible pattern between benefit type and category. Disability benefit claimants were most likely to be 'longer-term claimants' with only one – Kane – an unsuccessful bridger. Importantly, this links to participants' aspirations, with the four disabled benefit claimants who were longer-term claimants expressing aspirations that did not include moving into paid employment. The government might suggest this is evidence of the entrenched dependency of disability benefit claimants, but it could equally be seen as reflecting their greater and varied barriers to employment, which perhaps mean that an ongoing reliance on out-of-work benefits is sometimes the most realistic and appropriate option. Single parents featured in all three categories, and two were

'subjective bridgers' with both Rosie and Sophie managing to move off benefits and into work during the period of the research (see Chapter 6). None of the jobseekers in the sample were a 'longer-term' claimant, and three of the five were 'unsuccessful bridgers'. All four of the subjective bridgers (a combination of single parents and jobseekers) could be characterised as 'successful' subjective bridgers, in that each of them left benefits for a period of time during the course of the research.

For the bridgers in the sample, primarily single parents and young jobseekers, claiming benefits was seen as a temporary necessity rather than a static and continuous state, with aspirations firmly focused on a future which did not feature out-of-work benefits. While disability benefit claimants were more likely to imagine a future that did include continued benefit claiming, both Tessa and Sharon still hoped to move into employment when their health improved sufficiently to make this a realistic objective, with this longer-term aspiration an important part of their narratives and imagined futures.

9.3 Reflecting back on aspirations

In their third interviews, participants were shown the future orientated timelines they had completed in the second interview, when they had been asked to outline their plans, hopes and fears for the coming year. Given that this year had since passed, it was an opportunity for participants to reflect on how far and whether they had carried out their plans and if any of their hopes and/or fears had been realised. The timelines of Isobella, James, and Adrian are produced below. For James, his plans to move home and to take part in an Addiction Dependency Solutions (ADS) course (to address his drinking and substance use) had been realised. Isobella had achieved some of her plans (those circled on her timeline), including particular goals around re-thinking her involvement in permitted work and progressing with her DLA appeal (see Chapter 7). Adrian's timeline showed a range of plans and hopes; particularly around moving house and securing employment, none of which he had realised.

For some, being confronted with their imagined futures was difficult, particularly where they had not made the progress which they had hoped. In looking back at his timeline, Adrian noted that "not a single one" of his plans or hopes had been realised. He explained that seeing the timeline again:

Just opens my eyes that you should work towards your goals. (YJS, W3)

For different reasons, Isobella also found seeing her timeline again difficult. She explained:

It's sad really that there wasn't more in the way of plans, I guess. Although obviously, four out of five of the plans didn't really work out. But it is a bit sad that there's not more things I could have been positive about. It is quite sad to look at that and thinking, oh blimey, hopes and aspirations, there ain't much there [laughs]. (DBC, W3)

Others were actually surprised to see that some of their plans had been achieved, and this was particularly notable in James' account:

At least, sometimes when you think about it, you haven't achieved very much, just the same old shit, but look at that, I have achieved some stuff over last year. (YJS, W3)

James' comments show how it can be easy to miss the achievement of aspirations and goals when preoccupied and busy coping and managing with the present.

Figure 28 Isobella's timeline

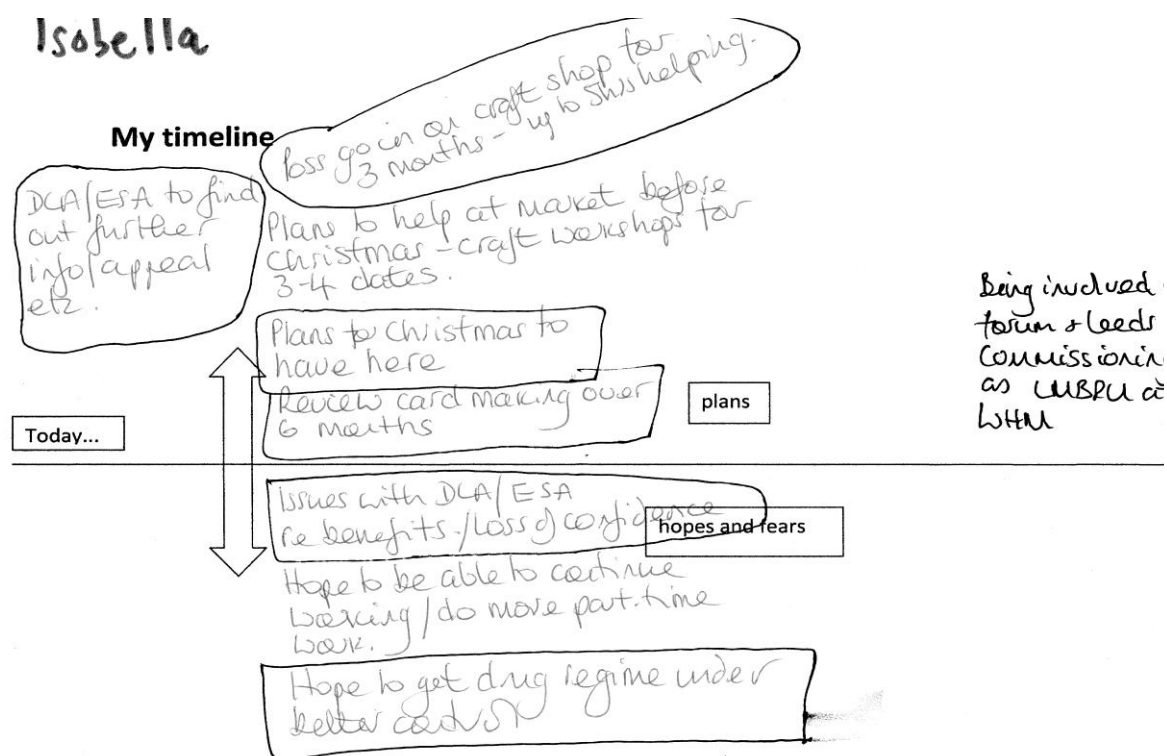


Figure 29 James' timeline

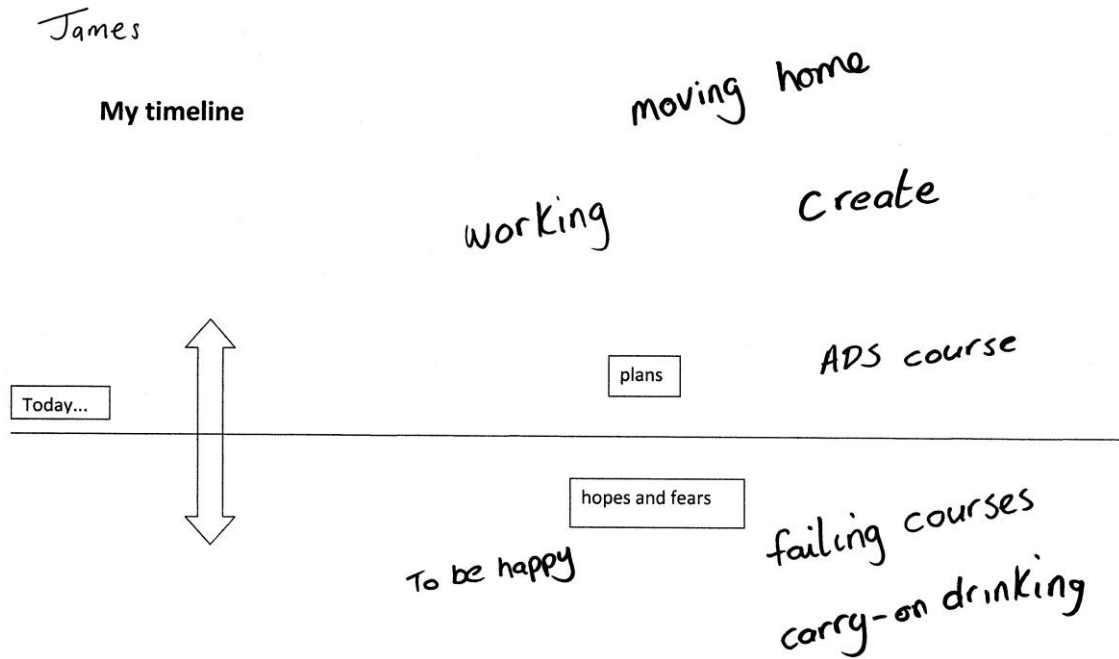
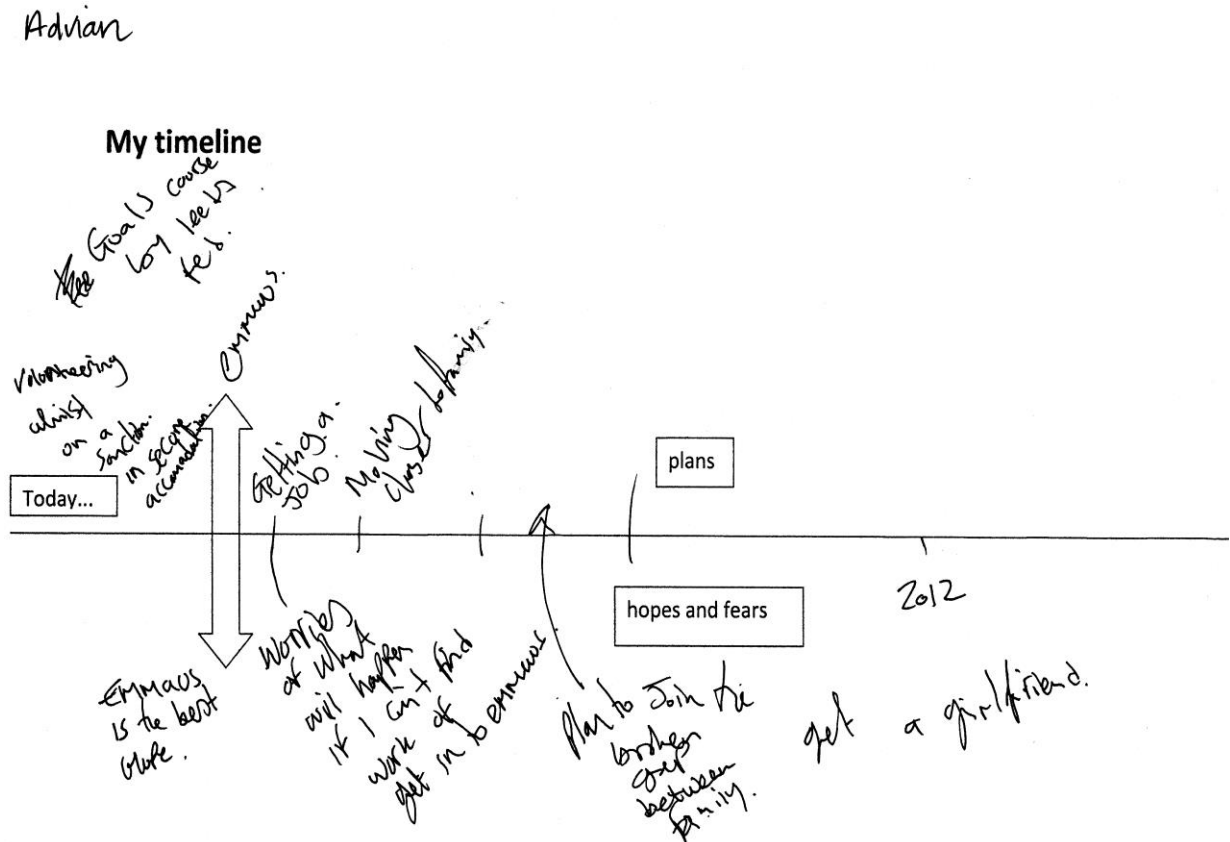


Figure 30 Adrian's timeline



9.4 A right to plan?

In exploring participants' aspirations over time, it was also notable that, for many, attention was necessarily focused on the hard work of managing day-to-day (see Chapters 5&7). Scope to actively plan for the future was compromised and often completely crowded out by the demands of 'getting by' on benefits (Lister, 2004), and the insecurity, uncertainty and instability that came with experiencing welfare reform. Budgeting on extremely tight margins is particularly detrimental to forward planning (Dearden et al., 2010; Pemberton et al., 2014), as it seems to close down the possibility of looking beyond daily efforts to eke out the essentials with limited available funds. When this tight budget management is married with an uncertainty around future benefit entitlement, whether this is tied to the ever-present threat of sanctions, or fears around changes to eligibility via disability benefit reform, attempts to make plans for positive changes in their lives often seemed to appear futile and out of reach to the participants.

Chloe was living day-to-day at the time of her final interview:

I'm living in present...day-to-day. Or maybe hour to hour, but I live every day as today. Ask me what I'm doing tomorrow and I won't [know]. I don't make plans. (SP, W3)

Susan found it harder to plan for the future while on benefits:

It's harder [to plan] because you don't know whether even you'll have the benefits (laughs) with these sanctions and everything. (SP, W3)

Adrian described how he felt 'stuck' on benefits, as if his reliance on out-of-work benefits was keeping him trapped in the present. In both his first and third interview, Adrian used the word 'stuck' to describe his current situation:

It feels like I'm at a crossroads, and I want to go this way and that way but because of [benefits] I can't go nowhere. I'm just stuck dead in the middle. (YJS, W1)

It feels like I'm just stuck in a point in time if you know what I mean, I can't see further in the future. (W3)

Adrian's description of himself as "stuck on benefits", something which was echoed in other participants' accounts is, perhaps, reflective of the frequent shrinking of time horizons caused by benefits reliance and poverty, with the demanding work of coping day-to-day making future thinking and planning much more difficult. The ways in which material hardship and the struggle to cope with the present impinge

upon and, all too often, prevent people from planning and thinking about the future are consistent themes in research with people living in poverty (Daly and Leonard, 2002; Dearden et al., 2010; Hughes and Emmel, 2012; Ridge, 2009). In describing their aspirations, participants commonly emphasised a hope for a future that included stability and security, with terms such as 'stable' and 'secure' reoccurring in individuals' idealised futures (see chapter 5). This perhaps emphasises the extent to which this security was lacking in their current lives, with their reliance on out-of-work benefits making financial and emotional insecurity almost inevitable.

In Chapter 5, a typology was created to distinguish between those who were 'active-planners' and those better characterised as 'day-by-day focused individuals'. It is notable that of the nine participants who achieved at least one of their aspirations over the course of the study, seven could be characterised as 'active planners'. This suggests that the planning work in which some of the participants engaged (or the circumstances which enabled them to engage in that planning) may have made a difference in better enabling them to achieve their aspirations. What is notable from this study is the ways in which the processes of welfare reform in particular, and 'getting by' on benefits in general, can actually serve to impede and undermine affected individuals' ability to 'plan' (see Chapters 5-7), thus making transitions into paid employment less rather than more likely. This is particularly ironic, given that the whole rationale for the government's approach is based on an attempt to 'support' people to make the 'welfare-to-work' journey.

To better facilitate this journey, more attention arguably needs to be paid to creating the conditions to ensure that people have the safety, security and space to actually make plans, here conceptualised as vital pre-conditions for effective and sustainable transitions into paid employment. Almost 40 years ago, Sinfield (1978) made a case for the importance of ensuring people have sufficient security to enable them to plan and make changes in their lives. Arguably, a right to a level of ontological security that enables one to plan for the future should be conceptualised as a fundamental citizenship right, one which is certainly not available to out-of-work benefit claimants in contemporary Britain, or to those struggling with in-work poverty and insecure employment (Shildrick et al., 2012b; Standing, 2014) (see Chapter 10).

9.5 'Getting by' over time

Before moving on to the case studies of participants' diverse journeys over time, it is worthwhile to pause and offer some reflections on what 'getting by' over time meant for the individuals in this study. While government and media depictions of benefit

claimants often characterise their lives as chaotic and dysfunctional, the experiences of the participants was much more variable. For many, life was fairly regular and predictable, with Isobella experiencing “life’s little struggles every day” (W2). James (W2) also suggested his life was fairly routine, describing how life is “just the same as usual, same routine, same day, same stuff.” Struggling to ‘get by’ on very little money certainly did not help participants to achieve either stability or security, and the experience of trying to make their benefit money stretch was perhaps the most important factor contributing to the (in)stability of their lives.

While some academics have questioned whether the struggle to ‘get by’ over time will test and undermine individuals’ resilience and tenacity (Hickman et al., 2014) what was notable in this study were participants’ continued efforts and determination to ‘make do’, which did not seem to lessen during the research. Nonetheless, there was no doubt that people’s capacity to be resilient was stretched and tested by the ongoing struggles to ‘get by’ in times of welfare reform. For example, Cath’s resilience was fragile and subject to change over time. In her second interview, Cath was feeling suicidal, and she explained how she had become tired of the struggle to ‘get by’:

I just don’t want to spend the rest of my life struggling, I’ve struggled all my life. (DBC, W2)

For some, such as James, their stoicism around their benefit receipt seemed to increase as their time on benefits lengthened. In his first interview, James was struggling to accept his life reliant on out-of-work benefits:

It’s a horrible experience [being on benefits]. A really horrible experience. (YJS, W1)

By the time of his third interview, James had been on benefits for over two years. He reflected on managing on benefits:

I’m used to it now. Been on benefits that long, I’m used to it. (W3)

James’ narrative could be interpreted as evidence that the longer individuals spend reliant on out-of-work benefits, the more likely they are to become affected by a ‘dependency culture’ where they choose to stay on benefits rather than move into paid employment. However, for James, this idea of being ‘used’ to benefits was more an expression of his becoming accepting of the necessary sacrifices and difficult choices between competing resources that ‘getting by’ entails (see Chapter 5). Indeed, James remained committed to trying to secure paid employment and

after the fieldwork had ended he managed to secure paid employment in a bathroom showroom.

9.6 Contrasting journeys: upwards, downwards and 'static' trajectories

This thesis has explored a small group of out-of-work claimants' experiences over time, as they responded to welfare reforms and negotiated difficult and dynamic relationships with the paid labour market. Over the timeframe of the research, participants' situations variously improved, worsened and (broadly) stayed the same, in what can be conceptualised as upward, downward and static trajectories. In this chapter, it is valuable to consider three participants' 'journeys' over time, contrasting the experiences of Rosie, Susan and Chloe, who have been deliberately chosen to reflect upward, static and downward trajectories. All three are single parents, and so all were managing competing responsibilities as potential workers and parents. The future orientated timelines of Rosie, Susan and Chloe are reproduced below.

Figure 31 Rosie's timeline

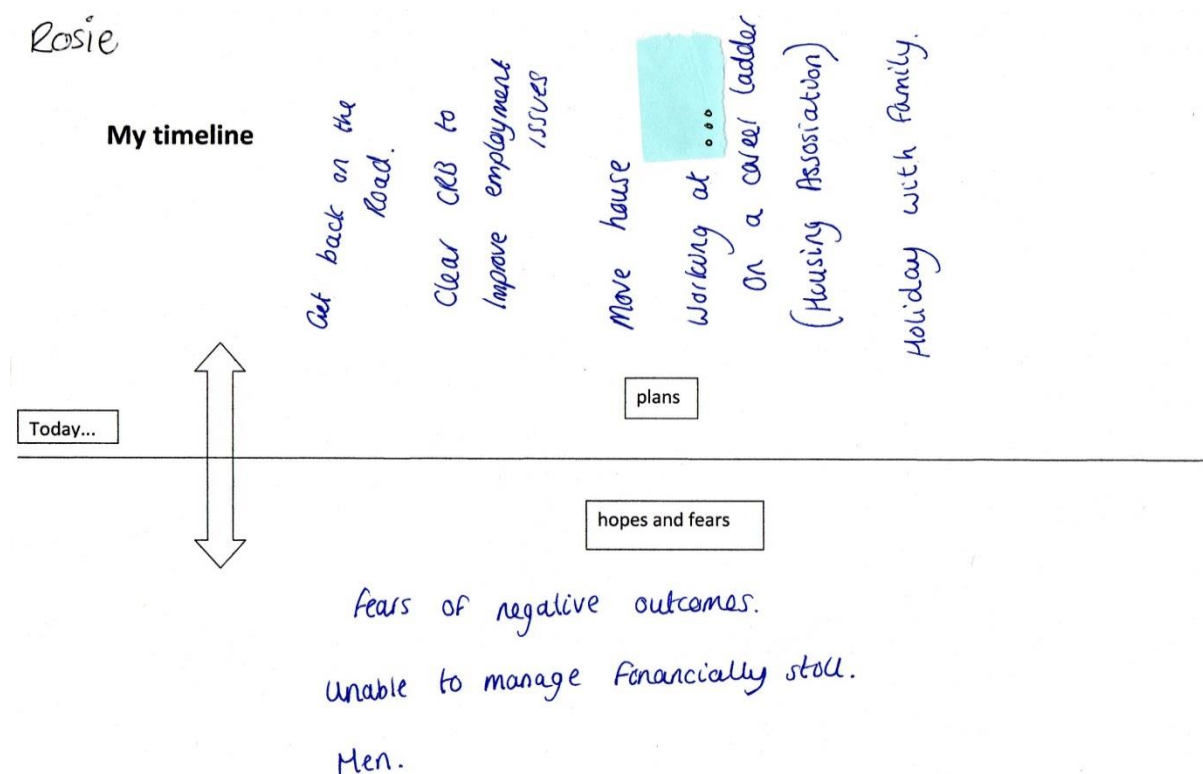


Figure 32 Susan's timeline

Susan

My timeline

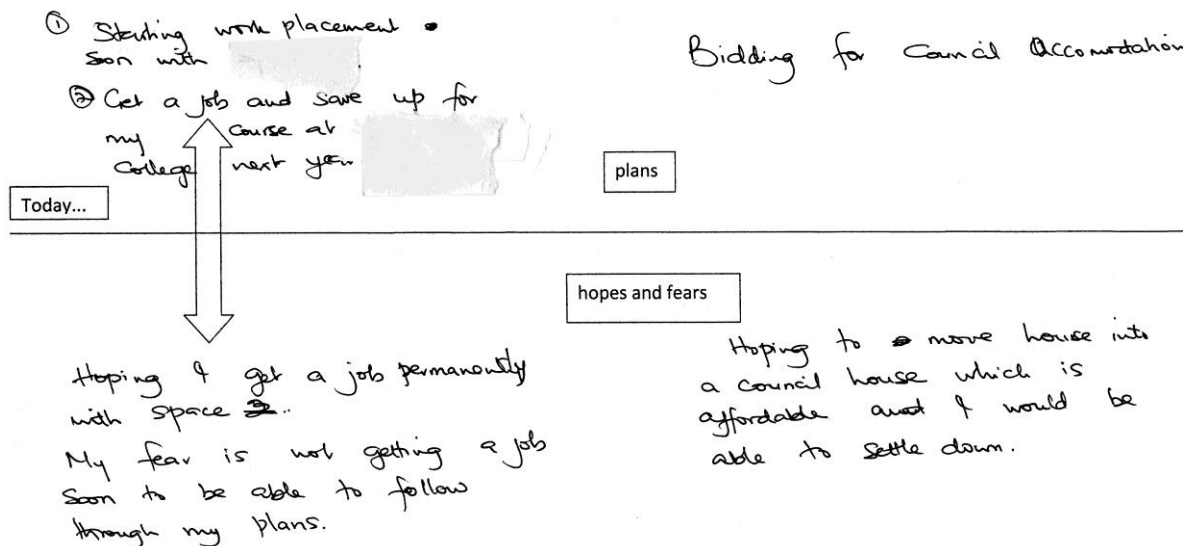
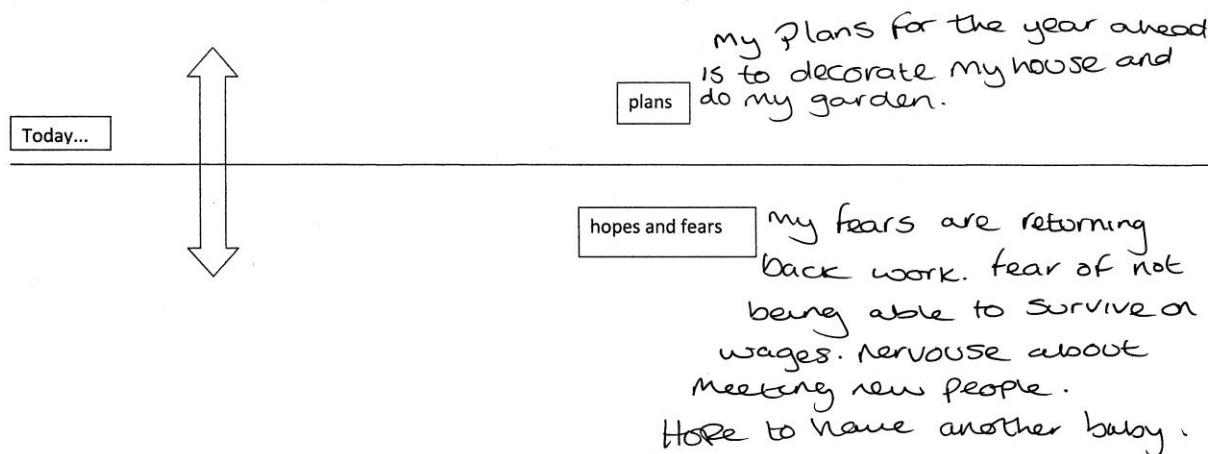


Figure 33 Chloe's timeline

Chloe

My timeline



The timelines show how both Rosie and Susan shared clear aspirations around paid employment, with Rosie expressing hopes to be working at a housing association, “on a career ladder”, while Susan simply wanted to “get a job”. By contrast, Chloe did not list employment as one of her hopes or plans for the future. Instead, it appeared dominantly as a fear, particularly around “not being able to survive on wages”, and being “nervous about meeting new people”.

9.6.1 Rosie – achieving positive change

For Rosie, the research period coincided with her transition into paid employment, first via work experience and then into a permanent position with the prospect of career progression. We have seen that Rosie described the move into employment as transformative (Chapter 6), associating it with an escape from the stigma and negative characterisations of benefit reliance (Chapter 8). Rosie found work just as she was about to be moved off IS and onto JSA as part of the government’s welfare reforms. As a result of moving into employment, she was unaffected by these changes, and did not have to experience increased interventions from the Job Centre, something she was certainly not looking forward to at the start of the research. In this way, Rosie’s journey through the research illustrates the intersections between people’s employment and benefits experiences, as well as the ways in which these experiences feed into and influence their identity.

Critically, in achieving positive change in her life, Rosie repeatedly emphasised the role of support provided by her housing association, support which she contrasted to the relative absence of help received from official agencies, most notably JCP (see Chapter 6). In particular, Rosie described the offer of work experience from her housing association as a turning point:

I was in a...[tenants meeting]. And I'd just come out and I was ready to go home and [staff member] called me over and asked [if I wanted to do some work experience]. And oh, I went home and I were so happy and I do remember that turning point. It's just really nice when someone gives you a chance to do something and make a life for yourself so that were definitely the turning point for me when they offered me that work experience. (SP, W3)

9.6.2 Susan – constancy despite active efforts

Susan’s experiences over time were certainly not static or passive, in that she was actively engaged in seeking employment, responding to and coping with various rejections and knockbacks, as well as navigating the changing welfare landscape and meeting JCP and WP demands. However, she ended the research in a similar position to where she started, in so far as she was still seeking paid employment, still

in private rented accommodation in which she was unhappy, and still struggling to cope with her treatment from the Job Centre. Reflecting on her timeline in her third interview, Susan responded to what she saw as the lack of change in her circumstances:

It looks like I'm not going anywhere [laughs]. I'm not progressing because this is the same, the same thing. (SP, W3)

While Susan's aspiration to secure paid employment went unrealised, she continued to hope for a future that included paid employment, reinforcing the endurance of such aspirations (see Chapter 5):

My key hopes are to get out of this house, most important, and get a job and settle down. (W3)

In trying to disentangle the different trajectories of Susan and Rosie, the most notable difference is in the assistance and support Rosie achieved from her Housing Association, assistance which acted as a stepping stone precipitating a whole chain of positive consequences for Rosie, the last of which was the offer of secure, stable employment.

9.6.3 Chloe – a downward trajectory

The experience of Chloe stands out across the research sample as the participant who was most resistant to seeking paid employment, and the only one who spoke of actively choosing to rely on benefits rather than entering paid employment (see Chapter 6). Chloe had a particularly difficult life history, which had included domestic violence, child abuse and substance misuse. Over time, Chloe was made subject to welfare reforms, and in particular the toughened regime of conditionality as she was migrated off IS and onto JSA and faced a benefits sanction. The increased pressures and demands made by the Job Centre contributed to a deterioration in Chloe's mental health, a deterioration which also affected her ability to care for and look after her children. In her third interview, Chloe described asking others to collect her children from school, as she could not face leaving the house. Reflecting on the impact of this on her children, Chloe said:

I feed 'em, I look after 'em, but...[I do the] bare minimum. It's rubbing off on them now, staying in all...[the time]. (SP, W3)

She described a daily life in which managing everyday tasks such as shopping had become impossible. Chloe explained that she sat in silence on her own for much of the day:

I don't get dressed; I only open my curtains 'cause I look at people [laughs]. But yeah, if I can sit here [on sofa] on me own. It's not even like I watch telly. It's bad. (W3)

Chloe had accrued various debts over a number of years, and explained how these were causing her significant anxiety and worry, leaving her feeling “like I can't lift me head above water.” (W3) As Chloe's situation deteriorated during the course of the study, her temporal frame actually shortened so that by the time of the third and final interview she was only able to plan a few hours ahead. With her time horizons contracted in this way, it inevitably became harder for Chloe to work towards a different future, so consumed was she by the difficulties of her daily life (see Chapter 7).

Looking across these three cases, what is notable is the way in which – for Rosie, Susan and Chloe – their relationships with paid employment were pivotal in determining and affecting their changing positions and identities over time. Rosie ended the research positive and hopeful, with her employment conceptualised as transformative, in some ways closely aligned to the government's characterisation of a welfare-to-work journey. By contrast, Susan's continued struggle to secure paid employment dominated her narrative, and was taking a toll as she continued to strive to secure work and to sustain the hope of a better future. In Chloe's case, the compulsion she faced within a welfare-to-work regime firmly orientated around supporting (or compelling) her into paid employment impacted upon her own life, and her ability to 'get by' on a day-to-day basis. This research has been able to walk alongside individuals as they navigate welfare reforms. Doing so has demonstrated how varied people's individual experiences are, starkly evident in contrasting the journeys of Rosie, Susan and Chloe.

9.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the position of participants at the end of the study, particularly in relation to the extent to which earlier expressed aspirations had been realised. This summary reemphasises the enduring aspirations of most participants to enter paid employment, as well as the reality that many were unable to achieve these and other goals during the time of the study. This short chapter concludes the empirical analysis from this thesis. Arguably, in exploring lived experiences of welfare reform, a clash has been exposed between citizenship as it is experienced from below and the dominant citizenship narratives imposed from above by politicians, ably assisted by the media. In the preceding chapters, an exploration

of what 'getting by' on benefits entails and the complex relationships between paid employment and out-of-work benefits receipt has built a picture of individuals who may be characterised as passive, inactive and uninterested in paid employment, but are in fact busy, hard at work and strongly orientated to securing paid employment, when this is a feasible objective. Despite the disjuncture between lived experiences and dominant narratives, we have also seen the extent to which these dominant narratives are variously appropriated, reproduced and contested by claimants themselves, in their descriptions of themselves and an 'undeserving' 'other'. These findings have important implications for both the current and future state of social citizenship in Britain today, and it is to a concluding discussion of these implications that this thesis now turns.

Chapter 10 Conclusion - The disjuncture between citizenship from above and citizenship from below

10.1 Introduction

The benefits system has created a benefit culture. It doesn't just allow people to act irresponsibly, but often actively encourages them to do so. Sometimes they deliberately follow the signals that are sent out... Other times, they hazily follow them, trapped in a fog of dependency (Cameron, 2011c, unpaginated).

In their analysis of the welfare 'problem', Cameron and his government have returned again and again to the idea of 'irresponsibility' as a motif for the deficits and shortcomings which are presumed to characterise the poorest in our society. As each new welfare reform has been rolled out, government ministers have described how their changes will promote more responsible behaviours, generally equated with participation in the formal labour market (cf. Cameron, 2012c; Duncan Smith, 2011). The hoped-for transition from welfare-to-work is conceptualised as enabling simultaneous transitions from irresponsibility to responsibility and from dependence to independence. Throughout, 'work', 'independence' and 'responsibility' are valorised and proclaimed, with their counterpoints only associated with stigma and problematic, undesirable behaviours.

This thesis has explored the implications of this judgemental, negative and – arguably – demoralising rhetoric. It has also explored how the welfare reforms designed to 'responsibilise' and promote working behaviours are actually experienced by those directly affected. Critically, this thesis has problematised the irresponsibility of out-of-work claimants, with a detailed exploration of the (mis)match between citizenship from above and citizenship as it is lived and experienced from below. This concluding chapter outlines the ways in which a focus on responsibilisation is based on a flawed analysis of these lived realities, with the policy approach operating to further exclude and marginalise those who rely on benefits for all or most of their income. Following a brief summary of the central findings from this thesis, their implications for policy, ideas of social citizenship and future research are considered in turn.

10.2 Research summary

The central argument of this research is that a stark disjuncture exists between the dominant narratives of citizenship: citizenship from above, and the day-to-day lived realities of citizenship for those on out-of-work benefits: citizenship from below

(Lister, 2011a). This disjuncture has been demonstrated in contrasting governmental understandings and policy approaches towards citizenship and social welfare with the lived experiences of a small group of out-of-work benefit claimants during times of welfare reform. Drawing on civic republican and liberal contractualist ideas of citizenship in tandem, the dominant citizenship narrative understands paid employment as the primary duty of the responsible citizen. It casts those who are not currently engaged in paid employment as 'irresponsible citizens' who need activating with support from the state, via a regime of conditionality and sanctions, to enable their inclusion both in the formal labour market and in society as dutiful, contributing citizens (see Chapter 2).

This narrative places great emphasis on dichotomous and divisive distinctions between 'hardworking' families and 'welfare dependants', a contemporary re-working of much older distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' populations. The 'strivers' and 'shirkers' division provides an overarching framework and justification for the policy approach adopted (see Chapter 3). Strivers are the insiders, already behaving as the government would like, while 'shirkers' are outsiders, requiring intervention and increasingly punitive measures to reform and address their non-working behaviours (Coote and Lyall, 2013). What is particularly ironic is that just as the welfare reform narrative 'individualises responsibility' and suggests that individuals are primarily responsible for their own poverty, it also casts them as passive and inactive, limiting any scope for their positive exercise of individual agency. So, out-of-work claimants are characterised as having only 'bad agency', with their poor decision making, absent work ethic, and lacking motivation all driving explanations for their poverty and non-employment.

To address the passive behaviours of 'welfare dependants', the coalition has followed its New Labour predecessors in placing a firm emphasis on the policy tools of welfare conditionality and sanctions (see Chapter 3). Conditionality has been steadily intensified and extended, with the ultimate sanction of three years without benefits now serving as indication of the government's intent. At the same time, the coalition has overseen a range of welfare reforms which effectively reduce that which is offered by way of a social security 'safety net', with reductions in both levels and eligibility for various forms of out-of-work support (see Chapter 3). Taken together, it is possible to conceptualise these reforms as a fundamental retrenchment of social welfare, with far-reaching and ongoing implications for those directly affected.

Through a small-scale qualitative longitudinal study which tracked the experiences of a group of out-of-work claimants experiencing some of the welfare reforms introduced (see Chapter 4), this research has been able to contrast the policy

rhetoric with lived realities on the ground. This research found a significant mismatch between the dominant characterisations of out-of-work claimants and day-to-day lived experiences. Rather than individuals who are passive and inactive, this study highlights the hard work which 'getting by' on benefits demands, work that is often demanding of energy, resources, and active agency, and work which is repeatedly neglected in government accounts (see Chapter 5). Many of the participants in this study were engaged in forms of contribution such as volunteering, care work, parenting and informal support, socially valuable activities that go unrecognised given the endless equation of responsibility with paid employment (see Chapter 5). Critically, too, rather than showing an active preference for benefits over paid employment, most of the participants described aspirations firmly focused on a future in paid employment, where this was seen as a realistic option (see Chapters 5&6). They rejected the popular idea of benefits as a 'lifestyle choice', and instead described the difficult and complex past lives that had led to their current reliance on out-of-work benefits (see Chapters 5&8).

While the government narrative suggests static groups of 'hardworking families' and 'welfare dependants' this study showed that fluid movements in, and out of, paid employment were in fact the norm for many as characterised by the low-pay, no pay cycle (Shildrick et al., 2012b) (see Chapter 6). Several of the participants moved into paid employment during the time of the research, with some of their experiences including examples of exploitation and pay well below the NMW. Critically, paid employment was conceptualised by the sample as bringing with it a range of non-pecuniary rewards, and in this way, their perspectives here coincided with the government's repeated emphasis on the transformative rewards of employment (see Chapter 6). However, while the government claims that it is doing all it can to support out-of-work claimants into paid employment this was not the experience of the sample, with many very critical of the welfare-to-work support they received (see Chapter 6).

This study also explored participants' experiences of welfare reform, with evidence that this was causing significant worry, anxiety and – in some cases – worsening individuals' mental health (see Chapter 7). There was evidence of the hardship that can be caused by conditionality and sanctions, as well as signs of a range of – sometimes ambiguous – responses to the conditionality regime (see Chapter 7). Participants explained that the uncertainty around future benefit changes was destabilising, and sometimes made it harder for them to plan for their future, with the present characterised by insecurity and anxiety.

There was some evidence of participants internalising the negative characterisations of benefit claimants, with benefit receipt consistently associated with stigma and shame (see Chapter 8). Individuals engaged in processes of 'othering' to defend their own deservingness by emphasising the undeservingness of an 'other' who did behave irresponsibly and/or choose benefits as a 'lifestyle choice' (see Chapter 8). Attitudes towards welfare reform were more favourable than participants' experiences of its ramifications might lead one to expect, and this is arguably linked to the 'othering' which provides a ready-made target group for the reform agenda (see Chapter 8). In tracking people's experiences over time, there was evidence of both upward and downward trajectories, with these often linked to changing relationships with paid employment and the conditionality regime (see Chapter 9).

The dominant model adopted by government posits that individual claimants are demonstrating flawed decision making, irresponsibility and a deficit of active agency, which is directly leading to their non-employment (Wright, 2015). Welfare reform and activation are then required and justified in order to alter the behaviour of individual claimants so that they can become 'active welfare subjects' as 'workers' (2015). But the findings from this study suggest that many claimants are already active, as evident in their efforts to secure employment and movements in (and out of) employment, as well as in the hard work that 'getting by' on benefits demands and the various forms of contribution in which many were engaged (see Chapter 5). These lived experiences better fit a counter model (Wright, 2015), which recognises that 'welfare subjects' are already active, 'beings' rather than 'becomings', with their agency mediated and sometimes threatened by interactions with bureaucratic systems and processes of welfare reform. The need for a 'responsibilisation of the poor' (Pykett, 2014) is arguably based on a flawed and simplistic characterisation of out-of-work benefit claimants as passive and inactive, a characterisation far removed from the day-to-day realities of the claimants in this study. Mapping the disjuncture of citizenship from above with citizenship from below is important, particularly given the implications for policy, citizenship and future research priorities. It is to an exploration of those implications that this chapter now turns, looking first at the policy dimension.

10.3 A new moral consensus on 'welfare'?

10.3.1 Sketching out the new moral consensus

While this thesis has focused on the dominant citizenship narrative from above, as it is understood and fed into policy by the coalition, it has positioned this narrative as

being part of, and contributing to, a broader consensus in both the popular media and much of public opinion around the 'problem' of 'welfare'. Indeed, it is possible today to speak of a 'new moral consensus on welfare' which sees government, the popular media and much of public opinion in agreement around both the 'problem' of 'welfare' and the 'problems' with those who rely on it for all or most of their income (see Chapter 8). This moralising perspective is centrally tied to an individualisation of responsibility, which suggests the poorest in society are responsible for the situation in which they find themselves (Wright, 2015). What Jensen (2015) describes as the 'machine of welfare commonsense' sees reality TV shows, media headlines and political pronouncements all aligned in the condemnatory and punitive gaze reserved for those on benefits and living in poverty.

This consensus is fundamentally 'moral' in tone, given that it makes moral judgements about the behaviours and character of others, and creates the logic for a 'moral project' to correct and address these perceived shortcomings, with 'active welfare' becoming an 'instrument for forging public morality' (Jones and Novak, 1999, p.181). Ironically, of course, what Cameron describes as his "moral mission" on welfare reform (2014c) serves to *de*-moralise out-of-work claimants, who experience the surrounding rhetoric and excluding narrative in profoundly damaging ways (Brown and Patrick, 2012). This research has shown how out-of-work claimants are themselves appropriating and operating from within this moral consensus, particularly evident in their internalisation of the negative descriptors of benefit claimants, and in their 'othering' of those who supposedly fit the dominant portrayal (see Chapter 8). This is perhaps unsurprising, given the pervasive reach of the moral consensus, and the difficulty for those with relatively limited resources to instigate a more widespread challenge to its terms and central assumptions.

10.3.2 Policy implications

This research questions the central tenets of this moral consensus, particularly around the presumed irresponsibility of out-of-work claimants and the idea that their passivity and inactivity are the primary reasons for their reliance on out-of-work benefits. Evidently, there are implications for the likely success of a policy approach which is shaped by, and deeply embedded in these ideas. Critically, this policy approach mobilises the individualisation of responsibility through a focus on the supply-side of the labour market, on what individual out-of-work claimants need to do and - be made to do - to activate them into paid employment. Such an analysis neglects the various demand-side barriers to an individual's employment, barriers which this research found to be significant in out-of-work claimants' enduring

difficulties in moving into secure and sustainable paid employment (Newman, 2011; Patrick, 2014b) (see Chapter 6).

An emphasis on conditionality and sanctions is logical when the starting point is a homogenous group of out-of-work claimants characterised by idleness and an active preference for benefits over paid employment. It becomes rather less logical if out-of-work claimants are understood as an already active group, busy with the work of managing on benefits, and coping with welfare reforms; individuals who are often strongly motivated to find paid employment, where it is a realistic option (see Chapters 5-7). This research suggests a need to reconsider the rationale for work-related welfare conditionality, while also placing much more policy attention on how far and whether the forms of welfare-to-work support provided are actually fit for purpose.

This research has explored experiences of welfare reform, and illustrated how individuals directly affected are often experiencing increased anxiety, worry and – on occasions – worsening mental health (see Chapter 7). These consequences, perhaps best described as living with the burden of welfare reform, do not appear to make people's transitions into paid employment any more likely. What is more, the short-term, immediate demands made of claimants by JCP and WP advisers and financial uncertainty created by welfare reform arguably operate together to reduce people's capacity for long-term planning and the future-orientated work that is necessary to create more positive futures for themselves and their families. Politicians and policy makers need to pay more attention to the perhaps unintended consequences of welfare reform's burden, and better consider how these consequences rub up against, and even undermine, the central welfare-to-work policy aspiration.

More also needs to be done to consider how welfare reform's burden extends not just to individuals affected but also to the wider social security infrastructure, encompassing both national and local government agencies as well as voluntary sector organisations supporting claimants. Whether it be the work involved in administering (or supporting a claimant with) an ESA appeal (Dugan, 2014), or the food banks that are in demand because of people's experiences of benefit delays and sanctions (Trussell Trust, 2015), welfare reform is placing new pressures (with associated costs) on this infrastructure, something under-acknowledged within the government's welfare reform as cost saving rhetoric.

Policy makers would also be wise to consider how far experiences of benefit stigma and shame and, in particular, the institutional stigma associated with claiming

benefits (Baumberg et al., 2012; Walker, 2014), can operate to demoralise affected individuals and adversely affect their self-confidence and thus readiness and capacity to make any transition into paid employment (see Chapter 8). There is a tension between the promise that welfare reform will assist people to make the transition from 'welfare' to 'work' and the reality that the benefits system is generative of stigma and shame. Mechanisms of 'welfare' and welfare reform treat targeted individuals in ways that emphasise their implied inferior citizenship status and so perhaps undermine their ability to search for, and secure, paid employment. To address this, there is real scope for politicians and policy makers to think much more ambitiously about what a shame-proofed social security system would look like (Lister, 2015b; Walker, 2014). Arguably, a social security system which actually reduces (or even removes) the stigma of benefits receipt might have the capacity to better support out-of-work benefit claimants to make sustainable transitions into employment, where this is a realistic option.

Given that this research has also shown individuals being exploited in low-paid, insecure forms of employment, it also adds to a growing body of research evidence calling for more action to attend to the nature of employment opportunities available, particularly at the bottom end of the labour market (Dean, 2014; O'Hara, 2014; Shildrick et al., 2012b). At the same time, policy needs to take more account of the heterogeneity and diverse needs and orientations of those who rely on out-of-work benefits at any one time, rather than treating and conceptualising them as a homogeneous, problematic population requiring activation. Most importantly, rather than a simplistic and static analysis of two groups of 'hard workers' and 'welfare dependants', the policy approach needs to recognise the fluidity and changing nature of individuals' experiences both on benefits and in paid employment, and in doing so move away from unhelpful and unworkable divisions between responsible and irresponsible populations.

10.4 Citizenship implications

10.4.1 The demise of social rights: (in)equality of status and (in)security

T H Marshall described social citizenship as holding the promise of 'equality of status' for all citizens, with social rights seen as offering something of substance to those living in poverty (Dwyer, 2010; Marshall, 1950). However, successive changes to social welfare provision mean that today social rights are increasingly residualised and made conditional on compliance with state-defined behaviours. Most recently, the coalition's reforms have increased the potential negative ramifications of non-

engagement with the conditionality regime, with sanctions described by some as a policy of 'deliberate destitution' (Fearn, 2015). This study has shown that welfare conditionality, while sometimes welcomed, is often experienced as a denial of individual agency, and negation of individuals' choice and control over their own lives. This can lead to feelings of powerlessness and anger, and can also create a climate of fear and insecurity, particularly when people are concerned that they may be targeted with sanctions. There were examples of welfare conditionality clashing with individuals' desire to prioritise their parenting responsibilities, while the immediacy of work-related demands sometimes interfered with people's longer-term employment aspirations. These consequences can be conceptualised as undermining individuals' citizenship rights, and can also perversely make individuals' fulfilment of citizenship duty (whether through paid employment or other socially valuable contributions) less rather than more likely where they impact negatively on individuals' self-confidence and mental health.

Today, out-of-work benefits reliance is almost inevitably associated with poverty and hardship, with a lack of financial resources often preventing individuals from being able to participate fully in mainstream society. This inability to participate, while borne out of structural constraints, is often experienced as a source of shame and embarrassment, itself tied to the stigma surrounding poverty and benefits receipt. While social rights still have some value, in offering *something* to those living in poverty, they certainly do not enable people to obtain equality of status, nor to achieve even a 'modicum of economic *security*' (Marshall, 1950, emphasis added). Instead, as this study has demonstrated, the lives of those on out-of-work benefits are characterised by a new status quo of uncertainty and insecurity, and enduring anxiety over their ability to 'get by' in the future as further welfare reforms are rolled out. What Wacquant (2010) calls the 'normalization of social insecurity' is destabilising and undermines individuals' ontological security and their capacity to look forward and plan for the future (New Economics Foundation, 2012). Taken together, it becomes questionable what, if anything, of value social citizenship rights offers to those relying on out-of-work benefits in twenty first century Britain.

10.4.2 Citizenship as an exclusionary process

Out-of-work claimants' 'welfare dependency' sees them granted a lesser, devalued citizenship status, with their non-work and benefits reliance stigmatised and derided. Government fuelled demarcations between the 'hardworking majority' and those who rely on benefits operate to 'other' claimants (Lister, 2015a), with conditionality and sanctions policy tools that seek to coerce and control them to become 'responsible' citizens. This is often done in the name of inclusion, with politicians repeatedly

promising that – by promoting and enforcing a work ethic – they will encourage responsible, working behaviours on the part of ‘the poor’, behaviours that carry with them the potential for integration into society.

This policy analysis and approach, however, only serve to exclude out-of-work claimants whose behaviours are judged, stigmatised and ultimately found wanting. Today, full social citizenship is closely wrapped up in participation in the paid labour market, with those who either choose or are unable to participate in paid employment experiencing a devalued citizenship status (Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2003; Patrick, 2014b). Importantly, though, the critical lens is firmly focused on those at the bottom end of the income spectrum, with those whose wealth enables them to choose not to engage in paid employment not subject to the same critique or social censure. Harrison and Sanders (2014) have developed the idea of a ‘social division in social control’ to reflect this differential treatment, noting that while those living in poverty are pushed, cajoled and punished for their non-compliance with state-defined expectations, the richer populations are treated far more favourably, only subject to occasional encouragement and incentive-led nudges. This differential treatment undermines the supposed equality of status of citizens, and is yet another driver of the effective exclusion from the citizenry of those subject to the most heavy-handed and persistent forms of social control through welfare conditionality.

10.4.3 Time, poverty and citizenship

Tracking participants over time, this study has observed how the experiences of poverty, welfare reforms and ongoing benefits reliance have sometimes been associated with a shortening of time horizons such that individuals feel unable or too fearful to look beyond the present (see Chapters 5-7,9). For many, the future becomes fearful and uncertain, rather than a resource or something to which they can look forward. At the same time, the short-term planning and management associated with budgeting on extremely tight margins can operate to prevent longer-term planning and future building work. Further, the demands made by officials associated with the welfare state are often short-term and immediate, and operate as another factor that can close down individuals’ timescapes (see Chapter 6). It is possible to characterise some of the participants as living in discontinuous time (Neale, 2015, in press), where their preoccupation and blinkered focus on the immediate present, what Chloe described as living “hour by hour” (SP, W3), sets them apart from the dominant flows of time in mainstream society (Bastian, 2014, cited in Neale, 2015, in press).

These experiences are best understood as a further form of citizenship exclusion, and one which again demonstrates the extent to which social rights are currently offering comparatively little to those living in poverty. In the 1970s, Sinfield (1978) called for more attention to be paid to relationships between social divisions of welfare and time; to the different abilities of individuals, families, classes and organisations to plan and make arrangements over time. This call is arguably more pertinent than ever, and there is scope for new research to explore how and in what ways the experiences of out-of-work benefits reliance impact and affect people's capacities to live through time, and to make and realise positive plans for the future.

10.4.4 From conditional to conditioned citizenship

In seeking to understand the changing shape of social citizenship in the UK, academics have commonly described a social citizenship that has become significantly more conditional, bound up in, and contingent on, fulfilment of state-defined activities and demands (Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Galston, 2005; Lister, 2011a). While this is an important and continuing trend, there is scope to consider how far the conditional nature of citizenship today sits alongside a conditioning which sees individual out-of-work claimants become increasingly accepting of the dominant framing, particularly around an individualisation of responsibility and the valorisation of paid employment (Dwyer and Ellison, 2009; Newman, 2011). In this analysis, individuals begin to 'self-govern', engaging in DIY social policy (Klein and Millar, 1995) as they seek to activate themselves to become responsible citizens.

The participants in this study certainly showed signs of appropriating the terms of the new moral consensus in ways that could make a descriptor of 'conditioned citizens' appropriate. For example, the equation of paid employment with responsible, independent behaviour was evident across most of the sample, with individuals self-critiquing and sometimes questioning their own non-working behaviours (see Chapters 6&8). Clearly, the association between paid employment and valued, responsible behaviours is long standing and has much wider roots than recent government's repeated valorisation of paid work. Nonetheless, it is notable how wholeheartedly most of the participants bought into ideas of paid work and out-of-work benefits reliance as positive and negative activities respectively. Throughout, participants described their benefits reliance as a shameful and negative state, and, where it was feasible, were hard at work trying to move from benefits into paid employment. Their relationships with paid employment were complex, but it was certainly the case that the formal labour market was commonly seen as offering a range of non-pecuniary rewards, and having the same transformative potential as imagined in the government's analysis. A clear contrast was often drawn between

out-of-work benefits reliance and the independence that was seen to come with earning one's own wage. Participants also appropriated the ideas of 'undeserving' 'welfare dependants' to describe and 'other' those who were seen not to deserve out-of-work benefits from the state. They therefore become active participants in the processes of demarcating the 'responsible' and 'irresponsible', in ways that ironically only extended their own potential exclusion as sitting on the wrong side of the responsible/irresponsible work/non-work divide (Walker, 2014).

It has been posited that the conditionality policy approach is reliant on its stigmatising narrative, with this narrative actually a tool of governance, what Tyler describes as 'governance through stigma' (2014b). Tyler suggests that stigma may have been designed into policy to nudge people off benefits (2014), and there was certainly evidence in this research of the stigma around benefits forming one of the many motivations for people wishing to move into paid employment. This links closely with Schram et al's (2008) argument that 'poverty governance' can include efforts to intentionally alter human subjectivities, changing individuals so that they become more likely to self-govern in ways that produce the outcomes desired, in this case to enter paid employment. Signs of 'poverty governance' and 'governance through stigma' suggests an effort not just to make benefit entitlement conditional on state-defined behaviours, but also *to condition* out-of-work benefit claimants so that they self-govern and take action to address those behaviours deemed problematic. The irony of conditionality, however, is that by making clear and unbending demands of its target population, and rarely offering choices or opportunity for the exercise of individual agency, it can actually undermine the potential for individuals to actively 'self-govern', and to take the steps which they feel will be most effective in helping them to make the transition from benefits to paid employment.

Taken together, then, it is possible to describe out-of-work benefit claimants as increasingly conditioned citizens, who are faced with a dominant and pervasive stigmatising narrative about their supposed irresponsible and deficit behaviours. As out-of-work citizens become conditioned, there is a risk that anger and a sense of blame for their own situation will turn inwards, or be directed at the supposedly undeserving behaviours of 'others'. This further threatens social solidarity and undermines any potential for a more proactive citizenship engagement and challenge to the current trend for citizenship to operate as a process of exclusion (Walker, 2014).

10.5 Theorising social citizenship

This thesis has demonstrated the value of employing social citizenship as a theoretical lens to explore processes of inclusion and exclusion for out-of-work benefit claimants during times of welfare reform. In thinking through the theoretical implications of the empirical analysis undertaken, it is important first to re-emphasise how far citizenship should be understood as an essentially contested and mobile concept, one which can variously function in both disciplinarian and more progressive and egalitarian ways, sometimes at the same time (Clarke et al., 2014; Lewis, 2004; Lister, 2008). In theorising social citizenship, it is vital to explore it as a relational process: dynamic, and changing over time, but fundamentally concerned with and driving processes of inclusion and exclusion. Arguably, its primary value as a concept is in directing our attention to these processes, and aiding an exploration of how far and whether citizenship is providing a 'status' of meaning for all those granted formal membership of the citizenship community.

In trying to better understand citizenship as it is lived and experienced, it is critical to attend to how it is experienced from below, with particular value in listening to those most excluded from the mainstream; in this instance, out-of-work benefit claimants. It is marked how far a supposedly emancipatory construct is now operating primarily as a tool of social control, in what can be described as a subversion of its original intent (Flint, 2009). There is scope to further explore the nature and implications of this subversion through both empirical and conceptual research. Before turning to the other research implications from this study, it is first necessary to briefly consider what remains of social citizenship's more progressive potential, exploring how far and whether it can still operate to drive inclusion rather than exclusion.

10.6 Towards a more inclusive social citizenship

While it might be tempting to write off social citizenship as a concept that has been entirely co-opted into dominant, exclusive narratives, this would be a mistake. Even in the current context, where it operates in disciplinary ways, citizenship still represents an emancipatory concept for marginalised social groups, who can adopt it to make demands on the state (Lister, 2011a). Further, this study has shown how it can also serve as an invaluable benchmark, with Marshall's 'equality of status' a relatively demanding objective against which to judge how social citizenship is functioning at any given time.

To capitalise on citizenship's emancipatory potential, there is a long overdue need to decidedly collapse the assumed relationships between responsibility, inclusion,

independence and participation in the paid labour market. These relationships take a static, uni-dimensional perspective on the realities of engagement in paid employment and the nature of dependency. There are more inclusive understandings of citizenship which broaden out definitions of 'work' to include other forms of contribution such as care work, volunteering and informal aid and support which, when married to an understanding of the dutiful citizen as one undertaking any of these various forms of work, can then enable many of those not currently in paid employment to fulfil their citizenship responsibilities (Dwyer, 2010; Lister, 2003; Williams, 2012b). This is particularly important for those, such as many disabled people, and single parents with young children, for whom paid employment is not currently a realistic option.

There is also a pressing need to replace the notion of 'welfare dependency' as a descriptor only applicable to those on out-of-work benefits, with the recognition that most of society is dependent on various forms of social welfare. Further, rather than fetishise a mythical independence, interdependence needs to be understood as an inevitable and positive feature of the human condition and the basis for all human interaction (Dean, 2004; Fraser and Gordon, 1994; Standing, 2014; Williams, 2012a). Throughout, there should be a focus on individuals' fluid and dynamic citizenship journeys through the life course, with individuals likely to be variously more or less responsible, more or less dependent at different points in their lives according to their particular circumstances and complex chains of interdependencies. Critically, taking a more fluid approach across the life course challenges ideas of a narrow group of 'welfare dependants' (Hills, 2015b; Roantree and Shaw, 2014). Analysis by the IFS found that 47.8% of individuals in families received benefits or tax credits (excluding Child Benefit) at some point over the 18 year period between 1991 and 2008 (Roantree and Shaw, 2014, p 10). This illustrates how reliance on social welfare over an individual's lifetime is much more widespread than a snapshot analysis might suggest.

At the same time, there is real scope to re-evaluate the policy emphasis on the responsibility to 'work', which could instead be thought of as a right currently denied to many hundreds of thousands of Britons (Dean, 2014). Dean's emphasis on a right to work fits with this research's finding around people's strong commitments and aspirations to engage in paid employment. If the 'right to work' is understood as a 'right to decent work' which could incorporate the right to participate in employment which provides a secure, living wage and enables an individual to escape poverty, this becomes a demanding objective, and one that, if realised, could affect millions (Dean, 2012). It would also necessitate greater policy attention on what more

governments can do to actually help those not in paid employment realise their aspirations to enter the formal labour market. Arguably, reconceptualising engagement in paid employment as a right as well as, if not instead of, a responsibility better fits with the enduring demand-side barriers to individuals' engagement in the formal labour market. Attention to the much more complex and transient nature of the relationship between paid employment and out-of-work benefit receipt can also have inclusionary consequences, given that it typically uncovers a strong and enduring work ethic amongst those currently out-of-work as well as aspirations and orientations to paid employment in step with those of 'mainstream' society.

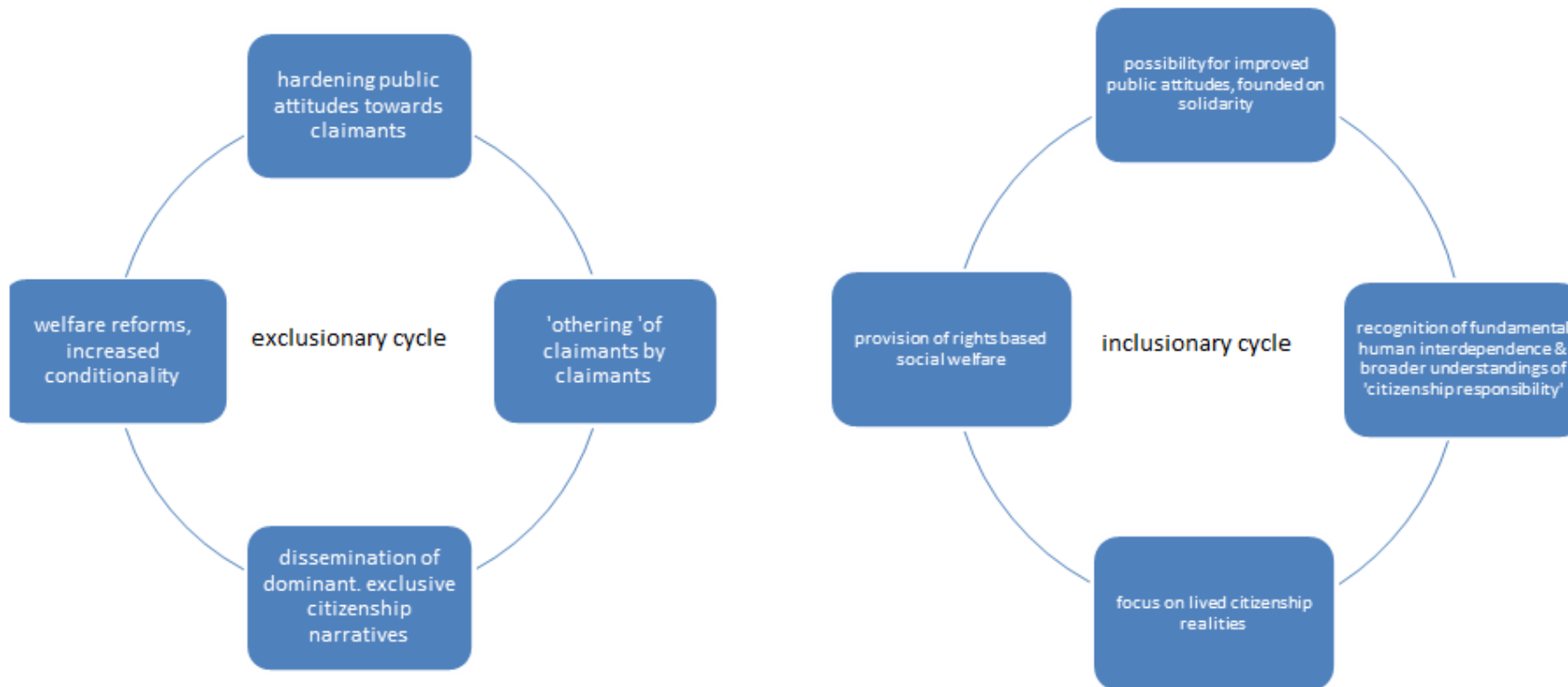
For social rights to have real meaning in the twenty first century, they also need to attend to what is arguably the key social issue of our times; pervasive insecurity. Orton (2015) and Standing (2014) have both highlighted how, for the majority of citizens, daily life is characterised by insecurity with (in)security a key axis between those who are struggling to 'get by' and the relatively small group in society who enjoy security and comparative certainty about their future. The problem of 'insecurity' resonates with public attitudes and unites most of society; it is a problem faced by nearly all of us (Orton, 2015). Looking forward, there is the scope for social rights to be conceived as having the potential to once again offer that 'security' through a reinvigoration of the social security 'safety net'.

Comparatively generous, unstigmatised social welfare provision could make a decisive difference to people's experiences of insecurity, with reassurance provided by the availability of a genuine safety net in times of need. This is notably absent at present. The form that social security should take in order to offer meaningful security to all is beyond the confines of this study, but there is scope to consider more emphasis on enforceable social rights and a move towards a reinvigorated focus on contribution, widely conceptualised to include participation in paid employment, caring, parenting and volunteering. There is some evidence that formalised and enforceable rights to social welfare bring with them greater protection and support that is less stigmatising and held in greater regard (Watts, 2014). At the same time, attending to the question of security focuses our attention to issues around the nature of paid employment, particularly for those currently experiencing low-paid, insecure jobs. There is a need for government intervention here, and again this can be done in the name of social citizenship, where this is understood as being about the provision of some level of 'security' for all.

While social citizenship is currently functioning in exclusionary ways, this is not necessarily or inevitably the case. The charts below shows how citizenship currently

operates, and how it might function differently, if some of the suggested reforms and changes were implemented. The 'cycle of inclusion' may appear utopian and unrealisable, but it indicates a necessary, and potentially emancipatory, direction of travel. Critically, both cycles highlight the relationships among public opinion, dominant citizenship narratives, and the substance of social rights of citizenship, and direct attention to how citizenship can function for either inclusive or exclusionary ends.

Figure 34 Cycles of citizenship inclusion and exclusion



10.7 Contribution of study and implications for further research

This study has demonstrated the potential in utilising qualitative longitudinal methodologies to track individuals over time as they variously experience and respond to welfare reforms (see Chapter 4). Answering the study's central research question, with its interest in exploring experiences of welfare reform over time, effectively mandated a longitudinal approach. Bringing time into the research design both as a vehicle and object of study (Henwood and Shirani, 2012) has proved invaluable, and been particularly significant in enabling the generation of new knowledge. The methodological and theoretical tool of time has enabled an exploration of how out-of-work claimants live through their presents, anticipate their futures, and reflect upon their pasts. Working across and through time starkly demonstrated how the prospect, experience and impact of welfare reform serves as a constant backdrop to affected individual lives. The experience of previous reforms often impinged on the present, particularly where reforms had created hardship or had adverse consequences such as leading to the loss of a home. Dealing with welfare reforms in the present required hard work, and entailed changes to daily routines when individuals were required to comply with new forms of welfare conditionality. Living with the constant uncertainty and anxiety about future reforms affected individuals' capacity to enjoy the present and undermined their ability to plan for the future. More needs to be done to explore relationships between time, poverty, benefits receipt, welfare reform, and citizenship, and this represents a rich area for future research.

Furthermore, taking a longitudinal approach has enabled the tracking of both the absence and presence of change in individuals' lives, creating a dynamic and fluid picture of responses to and experiences of welfare reform. The knowledge generated in this study has been able to capture lives in flux, as people grapple to comprehend and deal with changes in their benefits, employment status and wider lives. Walking alongside individuals as they responded to and dealt with these various changes enabled the researcher to develop insight into the nature of the burden of welfare reform. It also illustrated the extent to which an absence of change is (of course) not equivalent to an absence of activity or active effort. This was evident, for example, in the case of Susan who, despite not making a transition into paid employment during the study, spent the whole period busy and hard at work seeking employment, and attempting to improve her future chances of securing a job (see Chapters 7, 9). The evidence generated in this study of activity and hard work, sometimes unaccompanied by measureable change, is particularly pertinent

given the enduring dominance of a rhetoric that equates benefits receipt with passivity and inactivity. Such data could not be easily captured by other research methods, and so it also again illustrates the potential in conducting qualitative longitudinal enquiry.

It was also particularly valuable to be able to explore how far and whether people's anticipations of welfare reform's impact actually corresponded with their experiences, and how they then rationalised and responded to any gaps between expectations and lived experiences. This was particularly evident in the cases of Isobella and Tessa, both of whom initially assumed that the disability benefit reforms were not targeted at 'people like them'; the genuinely 'deserving'; but instead at 'others' who probably did not 'deserve' or need disability benefits (see Chapter 7). Over time, as both Isobella and Tessa found themselves directly affected by the reforms, they had to re-work their assumptions, in ways that led to a re-examination of the government's approach, and their own perspectives on welfare reform and on questions of 'deservingness' and 'undeservingness' more broadly. While previous studies have captured the expectation that welfare reform will be targeted at some 'other' (Clark, 2014; Garthwaite, 2014), without the longitudinal dimension they have been unable to explore whether such expectations proved correct.

Undoubtedly, there is untapped potential in the qualitative longitudinal methodology, particularly valuable in efforts to understand the dynamic interplay of structural reforms and individual responses over time (Corden and Millar, 2007b). In a recent presentation, Ridge (2015) described how moving from conducting qualitative cross-sectional research to qualitative longitudinal enquiry felt equivalent to moving from examining the social world in black-and-white to colour, a simile that captures the greater depth and richness of detail made possible by following people over time. All those with an interest in policy changes and reforms, particularly those policies orientated at creating behavioural change, would be well served to consider working over time when developing a new research design.

Just as important, though, is a research approach that recognises the expertise of those directly affected by government policies, and positions those experiencing poverty and out-of-work benefit receipt as the experts in these fields (Lister, 2004; Walker, 2014). In this study, a central objective was to listen to and record the experiences of those experiencing welfare reform, and to consider how the lived experiences revealed mapped onto the dominant narratives. The evidence this study provides of the extent to which lived experiences and political and media narratives are out of step is perhaps the central contribution of the research. Both policy makers and academics need to do much more to put the experiences and

perspectives of those with direct experiences of poverty and out-of-work benefit receipt at the centre of their policy analysis (Walker, 2014). The need for policy makers to do so is particularly pressing if they are to create a social security system better able to respond to and work with (rather than against) individuals' day-to-day lives, experiences and aspirations.

The consequences of welfare reform, and the downgrading of social citizenship which they entail, are still being felt, and this research does not claim to provide a summative assessment of their impact. While it is impossible to predict how individuals will fare under ongoing and future welfare reforms, it seems likely that the negative consequences of welfare reform already highlighted (Chapter 7) may be extended and intensified. It is critical to continue to track lived experiences of welfare reform into the future, and it is intended that this study will do so through further interviews, subject to securing additional research funding. It will be particularly important to explore whether individuals' capacity for resistance and resilience is affected by the cumulative and continuing nature of welfare reform, with limited signs of this already noted in both this research (Chapter 7) and other studies (Hickman et al., 2014; Lister et al., 2014; Roberts and Price, 2014; Roberts et al., 2014). It will also be necessary to consider how and whether participants' anger and resentment, both to the 'other' in power who is overseeing and implementing these reforms, and to the 'other', 'undeserving' claimants, evolves and changes over time. In addition, there is scope to scale up the study to create a larger evidence base for tracking lived experiences of welfare reform. With a bigger overall sample, it would be possible to tease out and consider differences in experiences of welfare reform according to gender, benefit claimant type, and distance from the paid labour market. This was not possible in the current research due to the small sample size.

Finally, though, a plea must be made for the analytical lens to shift upwards, to incorporate an analysis of the ir/responsible behaviours of those higher up the income chain (Wright, 2012). Policy makers, academics and politicians are complicit in seeming to focus almost exclusively on the presumed irresponsibility of those who are already most marginalised and excluded from society. In this case, the research has considered the extent of the mismatch between a presumed irresponsibility, and lived experiences, while in others, such as Dunn (2014), analysis is instead focused on issues of voluntary unemployment and the choosiness of those on out-of-work benefits. What we also need, however, is an examination of these same issues in other areas of society, particularly pertinent given the evidence emerging around widespread tax avoidance and evasion amongst some of society's richest citizens.

10.8 Concluding thoughts: irresponsible citizens?

This thesis questioned whether out-of-work claimants are best characterised as irresponsible citizens, with their non-working behaviours representative of a broader irresponsibility. This is the characterisation favoured by the government, which repeatedly describes claimants in stigmatising and derogatory terms. It is not, however, a characterisation supported by the evidence reported here. The out-of-work claimants in this study were responsible, hardworking citizens, hard at work when we conceptualise work more broadly to include the various forms of contribution in which so many of them were engaged as well as the work that seeking jobs and 'getting by' on benefits during times of welfare reform demands. Unfortunately, though, they were affected by the dominant narrative, which impacted upon how they saw themselves, and others, in only negative ways. As the Bishops of the Church of England warned in an open letter in advance of the 2015 General election:

There is a deep contradiction in the attitudes of a society which celebrates equality in principle yet treats some people, especially the poor and vulnerable, as unwanted, unvalued and unnoticed (The Church of England, 2015).

For the out-of-work claimants so treated, the citizenship consequences are stark, with social citizenship today operating as a process of exclusion and social control, separating and demarcating those whose non-working behaviours are problematised and found wanting.

It is critical to continue to listen to and forefront individual lived experience across society, given that these so often collapse and challenge the unhelpful and corrosive straw dichotomies built up between supposedly 'deserving' and 'undeserving' and 'responsible' and 'irresponsible' populations. As Flint argues, these are based on 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983, cited in Flint, 2009); communities whose demarcation and essential differences blur and fade away when we move from dominant narratives to lived realities on the ground. It is only fitting that the last word be reserved for one of the participants, Cath, here writing about her experiences of benefits for the Dole Animators (2013) website:

I'm grateful for benefits but it makes me feel like someone else owns me, like I don't have a future. I disagree that benefits are a 'lifestyle choice'. Life on benefits breaks your spirit, destroys families, makes folk homeless – who'd want that? You'd have to be a masochist. Politicians can talk about benefits claimants, they can hold the idea of a 'good life' on benefits as an idea,

conceptually, but until they experience it themselves, they have no knowledge of it. It's no easy ride. (DBC)

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Appendix One: Research Information Sheet

The Lived Experiences of Welfare Reform – Information Sheet

What's it all about?

These interviews are the key part of a research project looking at how people experience changes to their benefits. As you may know, the Government has announced a big programme of reforms which will include changes to a number of benefits and cuts in the levels of some. This research wants to look at how these changes impact on people who rely on benefits, so that it can contribute to the debate about these issues. Importantly, this research is part of a three year project which Ruth Patrick is conducting at the University of Leeds in order to get her PhD.



The goal of the research is to find out people's own attitudes, experiences and viewpoints about welfare reform and this is why these interviews are so important.



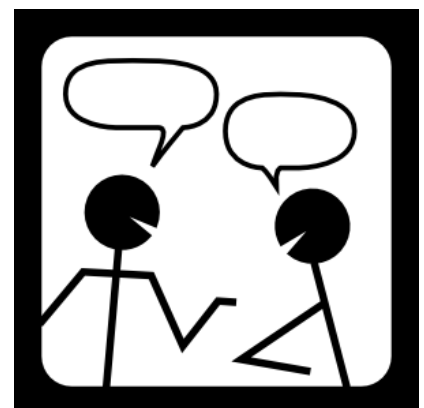
Why do you want to speak to me?

Ruth is looking to speak to a small number of people who are claiming out-of-work benefits, and who are likely to be affected by some of these reforms. Ruth is working closely with GATEKEEPER on this research, and they passed on your details.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and if you do not want to be involved that's absolutely fine.

What will the interview be about?

If you decide to participate, the interview will be an opportunity to talk about your experiences on benefits, and your attitudes to any recent changes. Ruth will ask a small number of questions about your attitudes towards benefits and work, as well as your hopes for the future. You do not have to answer every question and can choose to end the interview at any time.



What will happen in the interview?

The interview will take place at your own home, or the offices of GATEKEEPER if you would prefer.

The interview will be completely confidential. Whatever you say will not be passed on to anyone but the researcher. The only exception to this is if you say something that suggests that you or someone you know is at immediate risk of harm. Then, Ruth will have a duty to pass this on to the appropriate authorities.

The interview will be recorded for the research project. These recordings will be typed out and made anonymous: and you will be given a 'fake' name, a pseudonym. Your real name will not be known to anyone but the researcher.

The reason for the interview being recorded is so that your opinions and experiences, once made anonymous, can be included in a piece of research for Leeds University.

At the end of the interview, you will be given a £10 gift voucher as a thank you for taking part in this research.



What will happen after the interview?

After the interview, Ruth will anonymise the recording and type up what you said. She will send you a copy of this interview transcript if you would like. Ruth will be

interviewing a small number of people a second and third time, and she will discuss with you if you might be happy to be interviewed again.



These interviews will be written about in a research report for the University of Leeds. Ruth will also produce some summaries of the research, and will send one to you.

There may also be other opportunities to talk about the research findings, and Ruth will keep you informed about these in case you are interested.

How can I find out more?

If you have any questions or want to discuss any of this further, please do get in touch with Ruth on 0797 054 9801 or by email on r.patrick@leeds.ac.uk You can also get a message to Ruth via CONTACT AT GATEKEEPER

Appendix Two: Research consent forms

The Lived Experiences of Welfare Reform – Consent form

Please read each of these statements, checking that you agree with each statement before signing the form.

Important: Signing this consent form is not the same as signing a contract. Should you want to withdraw from the project at any stage, you are free to do so. If you decide to end your participation in this research you do not need to give any reasons about why you no longer want to be involved.

I confirm that I have understood the information sheet about the research.

I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this research project.

I agree to take part in this interview. I understand that I don't need to answer every question, and that I can end the interview at any point.

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly anonymous.

I understand that the researcher will have to tell someone if I disclose that either myself or someone else is at immediate risk of serious harm.

I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the reports that result from this project. I agree to my words being used in research reports, publications and potential contact with the media.

I consent to my contact details being kept by the researcher, in case she wants to contact me to speak to me about the research again.

PRINT NAME: _____

Participant Signature _____ **Date** _____

Researcher Signature _____ **Date** _____

If you have any questions at any time regarding the research, you are always free to contact the researcher, Ruth Patrick (Tel: 0797 054 9801 Email: r.patrick@leeds.ac.uk)

To confirm the credentials of this researcher contact Dr Teela Sanders, Postgraduate Research Tutor, University of Leeds, t.l.m.sanders@leeds.ac.uk or Tel: 0113 343 4714

The Lived Experiences of Welfare Reform – Consent form for archiving interview data

Please read each of these statements, checking that you agree with each statement before signing the form.

I consent for my interview materials to go into an archive.

I understand that this archiving process will mean that other researchers will have access to the recording of my interview(s).

I understand that my identity will be protected at all times.

PRINT NAME: _____

Participant Signature

_____ **Date** _____

Researcher Signature

_____ **Date** _____

If you have any questions at any time regarding the research, you are always free to contact the researcher, Ruth Patrick (Tel: 0797 054 9801 Email: r.patrick@leeds.ac.uk)

Appendix Three: Pen pictures

Adrian (LSMP) is in his mid 20s and lives on his own in a housing association property. Adrian had a difficult childhood, and started getting into trouble with the police from the age of 11. He links this to a difficult time following his discovery, aged nine, that the woman who was bringing him up was not, in fact, his real mother. Adrian committed a number of car crimes and was in and out of prison as a teenager and young adult. Adrian also spent time in care. He has not committed any major crimes since 2006, and feels really good about this. Adrian does not want to return to prison and wants instead to get on with his life. In the future, Adrian would like to run his own business, perhaps setting up a record label. He would like to get a job but sees this as a stepping stone to his long-term ambition to work for himself. Adrian has been on out-of-work benefits since leaving school and has never had a paid job.

At the first interview, Adrian is on a benefits sanction due to a misunderstanding regarding a jobseeker's direction. He describes having been sanctioned numerous times in the past, and explains how this has left him struggling to eat and shoplifting sandwiches to survive. His ability to 'get by' on a sanction is aided by the volunteering he does at a local homeless hostel. This volunteering, which he continues throughout the research, means that he gets the occasional free hot meal, something that he really values when he cannot afford to feed himself.

In the course of the research, Adrian is evicted from his housing association property due to building up arrears linked to his benefits sanctions. He also spends a short time in prison due to the non-payment of a fine connected with his theft of a sandwich when on a previous sanction. Having lost his flat, Adrian moves into the hostel where he has been volunteering. He describes looking for work and applying for jobs but without success. Looking to the future at the end of the research, Adrian still hopes to find a job, and to move, perhaps down to the Capital where he thinks it will be easier to find a job in the media, which is his current goal.

Amy is in her early 30s and lives in a privately rented bedsit with her husband, Steve. They have been living there since Steve got out of prison around six months ago. Steve was in prison for perpetrating domestic violence against Amy, and he has been in prison due to his violence towards Amy several times over the course of their nine year relationship. Amy and Steve have two children, but both have been adopted and they now have no contact with either of them. Amy volunteers at an Oxfam bookshop, and is also at college doing qualifications to improve her literacy. She describes herself as a carer for her husband, due to his learning difficulties.

Amy suffers from depression, anxiety and also has a leg condition which makes standing up for long periods and walking painful. She has been on benefits since leaving home aged 19, and has experienced spells of homelessness and frequent house moves. At the time of the interview, Amy has just been assessed as FFW following a claim for ESA. She is currently deciding whether or not to appeal the decision, and she and her husband are facing a long wait between the ESA claim closing and their first JSA payment. They are relying on food parcels and have

pawned several items to generate some money. Looking to the future, Amy hopes that she will one day have a permanent home and be able to settle down with her husband. She wants to have another child, and one which does not get adopted. Amy would also like to find a job and get off benefits for good.

Beckie is 60 and lives in a housing association property on her own. She has Bi-Polar Disorder and has been on disability benefits for 17 years, following a serious breakdown in 1994. Beckie receives IB, DLA and Severe Disablement Premium and describes being awarded DLA 'for life'. Before becoming ill, Beckie did work, and she describes a busy past life combining single parenthood of her four children with paid employment. Since becoming unwell, Beckie has volunteered in charity shops and likes to do crosswords and write poetry in her spare time.

Beckie's current home is a three bedroom property and she is worried she might be affected by the 'Bedroom Tax'. She is quite anxious about this, and really does not want to move at the moment as she feels settled in her property which has space for her grandchildren and children when they visit. Beckie describes spending much of her time caring for one of her children, **Jessica**, who has Paranoid Schizophrenia. She also does a lot of caring for her six grandchildren. In the future, Beckie would like to move – when she is ready – to a smaller property that is suitable for her old age. She has been given a laptop and is also keen to do a course in researching family trees.

Cath (LSMP) is in her late 50s and lives alone in a housing association property. She moved to this property less than a year before the research began, after a long battle to be moved from her previous home which was physically inaccessible. Cath has two adult sons, one of whom, Ed, is in prison at the time of the first interview. She has a difficult relationship with her other son, Trev, who was diagnosed with Epilepsy linked to his drug misuse. Cath also has two grandsons and a great niece. She describes her key responsibilities in life as looking after her children, and grandchildren, and the period of motherhood when her sons were young as the happiest time of her life.

At the time of the first interview, Cath is on IB and has been on benefits for about 10 years. She suffers from mental health issues, severe bowel problems, arthritis in her hips and a damaged sciatic nerve. She has put in a claim for DLA, but has been rejected twice before. Cath had a number of jobs before she became ill, working in care homes, managing working men's clubs and running her own stall in a market doing bric a brac. When asked about the future, Cath says 'I don't have a future' and she struggles to imagine a positive future for herself. She would like to start doing some voluntary work, and for her health to stay the same and not deteriorate. When thinking about the future, she worries about the benefit changes and the impact these will have on her life.

In the course of the research, Cath is refused DLA again but decides to appeal the decision with support from a welfare rights adviser. She is awarded DLA at a tribunal and describes the significant difference the extra money makes to her life. From having to struggle and budget every pound, she is now able to afford small luxuries and to take taxis to her medical appointments. Despite her worries about

the ESA reforms, Cath is placed on ESA without a WCA but is informed she may be liable to the 'Bedroom Tax' due to living alone in a two bedroom flat. Ongoing welfare reforms make Cath anxious about the future, and she worries that the money she has been given in DLA will be taken off her, either through the introduction of PIPs, or the 'Bedroom Tax'. At the final interview, looking to the future, Cath again finds it hard to be positive, but describes a particular hope to make time for herself and her own interests, rather than constantly looking after others (mainly family members).

Chloe (LSMP) is a single parent in her late 20s with two children, aged eight and four. She lives in a private rented flat in the area where she has lived most of her life. Chloe is on IS and also gets Child Tax Credits and Child Benefit. She finds managing on benefits a real struggle and frequently borrows money off friends and her father. When her children were younger, Chloe worked as a hospital cleaner and housekeeper: a job she really enjoyed. This role ended following relationship breakdown, and she has been on benefits for almost four years. Chloe has a variety of previous working experiences including working in cafes, florists, taxi ranks and in shops.

At the time of the first interview, Chloe describes not wanting to get a job as she does not feel it would make financial sense. She feels money is the main barrier to her moving into work as she believes she would need to find a job paying £400 to £500 a week to make working worthwhile. She describes preferring to plod along day-to-day rather than think about the future, although she does have aspirations for stability, more money and a nice house.

During the research, Chloe is moved from IS onto JSA. Chloe finds it very difficult to deal with this transition and, at the time of the last interview, she has recently been sanctioned for regularly failing to attend the Job Centre. Chloe explains that she is struggling with her mental health, and is finding it almost impossible to leave the house. She doesn't always manage to drop off and collect her children from school, and finds the prospect of doing the weekly shop really scary. Chloe is now receiving support from a charity, and they are helping her to put in an application for ESA. Chloe is managing only by living day-by-day and says that a move into paid employment now seems a very long way off.

Dan is in his late 30s and lives alone in a housing association flat. He has lived in this property for over three years, after a spell of homelessness. Dan suffers from depression and panic attacks. He has previously had problems with his cannabis use, and describes a young adult life where he regularly got into trouble with the police due to his temper. He is currently claiming IB and is just starting the process of being transferred onto ESA.

Dan has been in and out of work since he left school in the 1980s. He has worked in a wide variety of sectors, including in call centres, for Royal Mail and for cleaning contractors. Most recently, he started a new cleaning job but carried on signing on as he could not see any other way to manage while he waited to receive his first pay cheque. This was quickly discovered by the authorities and he describes receiving a 'slap on the wrist' and having to give up his job. He is not currently looking for work,

and argues that work does not really pay, particularly when you factor in the extra expenses associated with work such as travel costs. Dan says he likes to take each day as it comes, and does not seem to want to, or be able to, plan for the future.

Isobella (LSMP) is in her late 50s and lives alone. She has lived in Leeds for the last ten years, since moving up from London after being made redundant from her job as a Legal Secretary. Isobella had lived in London all her adult life, and worked throughout this time. When Isobella moved to Leeds she initially retrained as an aromatherapist, a job she loved, before she became unwell with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). The RA diagnosis had a massive impact on her life and forced her to make many changes, including giving up her aromatherapy business. She has been claiming IB for about four years, and describes how she manages to get by, although it is a struggle. She can only claim non-means tested benefits due to owning her own home, and having no mortgage.

Isobella is involved in a support group for disabled people in Leeds and also volunteers for her doctor surgery's patient liaison committee. At the time of the first interview, she is also engaged in Permitted Work, self-employed making and selling gift cards. In her first interview, Isobella describes how the future feels unknown and uncertain, particularly given the uncertainty around the government's welfare reforms.

During the research, Isobella is migrated off IB and initially placed in the WRAG of ESA. Due to her savings, and new regulations time limiting contributory ESA for those in the WRAG of ESA to 12 months, she finds out that her entitlement to benefits is coming to an end. Isobella is really upset and worried by this, and begins to try and overturn the decision to place her in the WRAG. At the same time, she is also waiting for the outcome of a challenge to an unsuccessful application for DLA. Isobella describes how dealing with these benefit changes and challenges causes her anxiety and uncertainty, and contributes to feelings of depression.

By the end of the research, Isobella has decided to stop doing her Permitted Work as her health has been deteriorating and she's worried that doing this work makes her an easier target for the government's reductions in benefits and support. Her WFIs at JCP have been switched to telephone appointments, which she is pleased about. Isobella does not see the point of these appointments as moving into work does not seem a realistic prospect. She has found out that her appeal of DLA has been refused, but decides to put in another application for DLA. As the research period ends, she is still waiting to find out what will happen with her ESA. Her aspirations are simply that her health does not deteriorate further, and that she is left alone by the government.

James (LSMP) is in his mid-20s and starts the research living on his own in supported housing. He is trying to get his life back on track following a period of homelessness, including some rough sleeping. He is on JSA and has been out of work for about six months. James has a five year old daughter, who he looks after every weekend. He has been trying to gain full-time custody of her, but so far without success. James has had problems with alcohol and crack cocaine in the past, and is trying to get some specialist support to deal with his ongoing alcohol issues. He describes the current help he receives from a support worker as the 'best' he could ask for.

In his first interview, James explains that he has been advised that it is not currently financially viable for him to work, due to the high rent of his supported housing. In the future, James would like to move into secure social housing and work to build a better life for him and his daughter. In the long term, he says he does want to go back to work so that he can have some financial security and begin to feel proud about himself again.

In the course of the research, James moves into a social housing property, and forms a relationship with a former neighbour. This relationship continues throughout the research and James' new partner moves in with him. James also attends counselling and support for his alcohol use, and describes getting this better under control. Once he has moved into the council property, James begins to actively seek work, but without success. He is referred onto the Work Programme but reports finding the support unhelpful and disappointing. He does have some interviews, but is not selected, and worries he is being passed over in preference to immigrants. He continues to hope for a future where he can be 'normal' with a job, and a spare bit of money in his pocket.

JD is in his 40s and lives alone in a two bedroom housing association property. He is recently widowed, and is still coming to terms with the death of his severely disabled wife. JD was his wife's main carer, and has been on her disability claim since he lost his factory job several years ago. He is worried that he may have to move due to the 'Bedroom Tax', and is concerned that he will lose the home he shared with his wife for almost thirteen years.

Following his wife's death, JD has been in receipt of ESA, and receiving regular sick notes from his GP. He is not sure but he thinks that these sick notes attribute his non-working to the stress he is currently under, and his continuing grieving for his wife. JD anticipates that he will not be able to get these sick notes for much longer, and is preparing himself for being moved onto JSA. JD feels that he is nearly ready to return to work, but wants to do this in his own time. He would quite like a driving job, or a role at a new supermarket which is currently being built near to where he lives. He is worried that he will find it hard to find a job that will make him better off than he currently is on benefits, and says he would be looking to earn around £300 a week.

Jessica is in her late 30s and lives alone in a housing association property. She is settled in her current accommodation which is near to her mum, **Beckie**, and also close to her partner, who lives around the corner. Jessica has paranoid schizophrenia and has been in and out of hospital for years. She has been ill since she gave birth to her son 16 years ago. Her son now lives with his paternal grandmother and her other child has been adopted. Jessica describes her two children as her most important responsibilities, even though she does not formally care for them.

Jessica has worked in the past, but currently does not feel well enough to be in employment. She is currently in receipt of IB and DLA. She has been on these benefits for 13 years and has never been re-assessed during this time. She doesn't know much about the forthcoming welfare reforms, but says that any changes to her

benefits would only negatively affect her mental health. Jessica describes how she currently feels quite lucky because she receives enough to enable her to plan for the future and manage all right. When asked about her hopes for the future, Jessica says she wants to stay as well as she can and try her hardest to stay out of hospital.

Jim is in his early 30s and lives in a socially rented flat with his partner, **Tessa**, and his dog. Jim is a full-time carer for his partner, who has paranoid schizophrenia, and his brother who also has schizophrenia. Jim finds this care work emotionally draining and stressful, and explains that it takes up most of his time. Jim also has schizophrenia and has been on disability benefits following a breakdown seven years ago. He receives IB, Severe Disablement Premium, DLA and Carers Allowance, and describes managing okay on the money he receives. He is very preoccupied with possible future changes to his benefits, and is concerned that any changes will have a negative impact on his mental health.

Jim has a history of problems with drugs and alcohol, and used amphetamines, cannabis and alcohol regularly before becoming very unwell. In the past 12 months, he has been abstaining from alcohol completely and describes feeling much better as a result. Before becoming ill, Jim had a variety of jobs including dishwashing, working in a bookmakers and in customer services for a DIY retail store. At the moment, he does not feel well enough to work. In the future, he would like to go to university and study communications. He would also like to stop smoking, and is hopeful he will achieve this in the next year.

Josh (LSMP) is a 19 year old care leaver who lives alone in a social housing flat. He has lived in the same property for nearly three years, since leaving foster care aged 16. He likes where he lives, although he has had some problems with neighbours who have complained about him playing loud music and making noise late at night. Josh's mother died when he was eight years old, and after a short spell being looked after by his grandmother, he was put into care. Since leaving care, he has struggled with the responsibilities of being independent; getting into substantial debt. He now receives additional help from a support worker, and describes this as very important to him.

Josh is on JSA and has been on and off benefits since leaving school at 16. He has done seasonal work for the Royal Mail, and training in Care Work. He has had various experiences of New Deal and other welfare-to-work programmes, which he describes very negatively. At his first interview, Josh describes aspirations to get off benefits and find a job. He is also waiting to turn 21, when he will receive his inheritance from his mother.

During the research, Josh has a further spell doing seasonal work for the Royal Mail. Although he enjoys the work, he is frustrated by the low-pay and insecurity, and the role's temporary nature. He also starts working at a corner shop, receiving just £80 a week for working six days a week, five or six hours a day. He receives a considerable inheritance from his mother's estate, and so has to sign off JSA. Josh is pleased to be no longer claiming benefits and describes a sense of relief at no longer having to attend JCP appointments. Josh ends the research hopeful about

the future; he wants to stay off benefits, and is making lots of plans for the future including going on holiday and decorating his flat.

Kane (LSMP) is in his early 20s and lives alone in a housing association flat. He has lived there for just less than a year after a spell in a hostel for people with mental health issues. Kane is currently claiming IB, and suffers from mental health issues including psychosis and depression. He was studying engineering at the city's university, until he suffered a breakdown and ended up in hospital. Before going to university, Kane was in the army but was discharged on medical grounds. He has also worked in catering in the past. Kane is waiting to be reassessed for ESA, and is quite anxious about this. He is concerned he will be found fit for work, and placed on JSA where he fears he will be quickly sanctioned. In the future, Kane would like to return to university by studying with the Open University. He would like to combine his studies with part-time work, and is also thinking of moving to the city where his girlfriend lives.

During the research, Kane is reassessed for ESA and placed in the WRAG of ESA. Kane describes his surprise at this outcome, and is very relieved and pleased to be awarded ongoing disability benefits. At the same time he's quite frustrated as he is offered no work-related help, and is not even asked to attend a WFI. He starts thinking about doing some voluntary work, and progressing with his university plans. However, his mental health declines, and combined with his drug and alcohol misuse, this makes him very unwell. He is convicted of arson after he and his girlfriend set fire to his flat accidentally. In his third interview, held in prison, Kane explains he has found prison a positive experience. He has become 'born again' as a Christian, and feels he has benefited from the greater support with his mental health, and the chance to become drug and alcohol free. He has been doing an IT course in prison too, which he has enjoyed. When he is released, Kane hopes to start volunteering at a homeless shelter and would also like to move forward with his plans to commence an Open University degree.

Karen (LSMP) is in her 20s and lives in social housing with her four year old son. She has just moved into a secure tenancy, after being in various forms of temporary housing over the past few years following a history of domestic violence. Karen is a single parent, but describes the support she receives from her son's father, and both her own and her ex-partner's family. Prior to becoming a parent, Karen worked in retail and says she used to enjoy work and the money and freedom which came with earning a wage. She struggles to manage on benefits, and finds that the money rarely lasts until her next payment.

At her first interview, Karen explains that she would like to go back to work but she feels like she does not know where to start, and describes her lack of confidence as her biggest barrier. Despite being on IS as a single parent, Karen has had no input from the JCP and has never been asked to attend a WFI. Karen attends a support group for people affected by domestic violence, and does say this is helping with improving her confidence. In the future, Karen would like to return to work and be able to afford to take her son on holiday, or afford a special treat for him, like going to a theme park.

Karen is only interviewed once more, as contact is lost between the second and third interviews. In her second interview, Karen explained that the JCP are preparing to move her onto JSA, something she is anxious about. It is happening at the same time as her son is just about to start school, and she feels worried about how she will find a job that fits around school hours. She is also worried that she will get less money on JSA. Karen explains that she needs help to return to work, but does not feel like she is currently accessing any such support.

Robert (LSMP) is in his mid-20s and lives in a local authority flat with his two dogs. He's been in this flat for less than a year, prior to which he was in supported housing following a long period of homelessness. He still receives support from a local charity, which he finds particularly helpful in dealing with officials at DWP and JCP. Robert is currently on JSA, and has been on benefits for about four years. He does work part-time as a steward for the city's football stadium, but he only gets about four hours a week work from this, so has to claim benefits. In the past, Robert has worked for the local council as well as in a garage.

Robert really wants to find work as a security guard, but to do this he needs to become registered which costs around £250, something he cannot afford. The Job Centre sent him on a course to become a security guard, but he explains that this course is useless without his registration. He is frustrated as JCP used to pay for people's certification but this was recently stopped. Robert describes applying for about seven jobs a week, mainly online. In the four years since he last worked, he has applied for hundreds of jobs but never been interviewed. Robert has been on various welfare-to-work courses, and New Deals, and been sanctioned a number of times. He is coming to the end of a two week sanction at the time of the first interview. He applied for hardship on this current sanction, with a support worker's help, but his application was rejected. To survive, Robert has had to borrow money from his friends.

During the research, Robert has two short spells of employment, first working for a water chlorination company for a fixed rate of £30 a day, and then as a labourer on a building site. He enjoys both jobs, and particularly liked being out of the house and having some extra money. He has to sign back on between jobs, and describes problems and delays with getting his JSA claim back up and running. He is referred onto the Work Programme, and finds the demands being made of him both difficult to meet and, he feels, unfair. By the end of the research, Robert's support worker has managed to get his security registration paid for, and he is now hopeful that he will find work in security.

Rosie (LSMP) is in her late 20s and lives in a housing association property with her four year old son. She is claiming IS and tax credits while looking for work. Rosie has worked since having her son, and has done a variety of part-time jobs including work in a fish and chips shop, and in a sandwich bar. She describes transitioning on and off benefits, in and out of work, and lost her most recent job in a café when her employers had to let her go due to their business struggling.

Rosie finds being on benefits very difficult, and says it is almost impossible to cope on the money she receives. She is in quite a lot of debt, and has arrears on her rent.

Rosie struggles with her mental health, and has been having a difficult time recently due to a relationship breakdown. After a particularly difficult time, she has been accessing additional support from her housing association. Thinking about the future, Rosie describes how she really wants to move into work. However, she explains that she thinks of the jobs she's had since having her son as 'little jobs' and what she really wants for her next job is something that could allow her to develop and help build a career.

During the research, Rosie is offered work experience at her housing association which she accepts, and enjoys. The offer of work experience follows on from Rosie's participation in a self-confidence and employability course run by the housing association. She receives notification from JCP that she will be moved onto JSA, and is unclear about what this might mean for her. However, before she has to move onto JSA Rosie enters part-time employment at the housing association. Her job, as a Project Officer, includes the opportunity for progression, and – at the end of the research – Rosie is being encouraged by her manager to apply for a Customer Service Apprenticeship, which would include specialist qualifications. Reflecting on the research period, Rosie describes how her life has changed considerably, and explains that she feels much better about herself now that she is in paid work.

Sam (LSMP) is a 21 year old care leaver, who has just moved into her first independent home after leaving her foster carers. She lived with foster carers from the age of eight, and describes the transition into independent living as a big change that is both frightening and exciting. At the beginning of the research, Sam is on IS and attending college doing an IT course. She has a boyfriend, who she met at college and who she hopes to one day marry. Sam receives support from a social worker and a specialist leaving care team, and she describes their input as very important. It is particularly important at the beginning of research period, as she is being moved from IS onto JSA. Sam has been warned that this change might threaten her ability to stay in her full-time college course given the availability to work conditions implicit in JSA. Sam is worried and upset about this, as she really wants to finish the course (she is half way through a two year qualification).

During the research, Sam is moved onto JSA but allowed to continue at college. She ends up leaving prematurely, though, after a fall out with a course tutor over a deadline for an assessment. By the end of the research, Sam is on the Work Programme and looking for work. She describes her main aspiration as finding a job, but thinks that her lack of experience is holding her back. She has managed to get a bit of cash in hand work cleaning in a fish and chips shop, and has had some extra support with budgeting and household managing from her birth parents. Sam receives a sanction due to failing to attend an appointment when it was snowing, which she says she can understand. At the end of the research, she is hopeful that the support from the Work Programme will make a difference, and she will manage to find a job.

Sharon (LSMP) is a single parent in her 20s who lives with her toddler son in social housing. Sharon suffers from depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder as well as serious bladder problems that were caused by the birth of her son. She is currently in the WRAG of ESA, but was only awarded this fairly recently following an

appeal. Prior to becoming pregnant, Sharon had just started a painting and decorating course at a local building college, and had previously worked in a hairdressers and a pizza take away. In the future, she would like to train as a nurse, and has a longer-term ambition to become a doctor. She would also like to meet a nice man, and have another child. Before any of that, though, her priority is to get her 'head sorted', and improve her mental health. She is also desperate to move house, as she is paranoid about her current property following part of the ceiling falling down on her last year.

During the research, Sharon finds out that she is to be reassessed for ESA, and so must go through the process of reapplying, and possibly attending medicals again. She finds this very upsetting, and is angry about being 'judged' and 'tested' for a second time. She explains how this is only worsening her mental health, and in particular her anxiety and paranoia. In the event, Sharon is placed in the WRAG of ESA without having to attend a medical. At the same time as having her ESA reviewed, Sharon is being supported to put in an application for DLA. She is also attending WFIs at the Job Centre. After just one interview, though, these are transferred to telephone appointments, which Sharon is pleased about. She does not see the point of these interviews as neither she nor her JCP adviser think she is ready to work. Sharon's application for DLA is successful, but is then very quickly reassessed. The money she receives in DLA makes a big difference, in enabling her to pay for taxis to take her son to nursery (something which her anxieties had previously prevented her from doing). Sharon is worried about what she will do if her DLA is withdrawn.

Throughout the research, Sharon receives support with her mental health and additional needs from a support worker, and psychologist. However, due to funding cuts, and limitations on duration of support available, these are both coming to an end at the final interview. Sharon is anxious about how she will manage without this support, and her psychologist has placed her on waiting lists for various alternative services. She has been referred to some support from volunteers, but did not find this very helpful. In the future, she still wants to go to work, but feels like this is something for the longer-term.

Sophie (LSMP) is in her late 20s and a single parent of three children (aged four, seven and eight). She recently moved into a housing association property after years of moving between private rented and emergency accommodation (moving 33 times in the past four years alone). She is settled and happy in her new house, and is busy trying to decorate and get it just as she would like. Sophie claims IS, and Child Tax Credits. She finds it difficult to manage on benefits, and gets angry about the negative ways in which single parents are portrayed.

At her first interview, Sophie explains that her youngest is just about to start school and so she is keen to think about options for work. She has asked the Job Centre for an extra WFI to discuss things, but they refused saying she would have to wait for an appointment in the usual way. Sophie knows she may be moved onto JSA soon, but is not bothered about this as she says she is keen to find work. She has a long work history, and did a job in a bingo hall for a short time when her youngest child was six months old. She had to stop this, though, due to problems with her tax credits which left her worse off. Sophie has also worked in retail, and in waitressing

and for taxi firms. In the future, Sophie would like any job she can find and her main aim is to build a better future for her and her children.

During the research, Sophie's youngest child starts school and she is moved onto JSA. Her adviser at the Job Centre suggests that she is not ready for work, and that she would be better off considering volunteering. Sophie finds this frustrating as she really wants to find a job. She completes the decoration of her house, and applies for a wide range of jobs. One of her applications is successful, and she briefly works in tele-sales. Sophie loves this job but has to give it up when the school holidays come and she cannot find any child care. She is really disappointed about this, but is determined to continue to find work. This remains her main hope for the future.

Susan (LSMP) is in her 40s and lives in a private rented house with her eight year old daughter. At the time of the first interview, she has been in the city for three years after separating from her abusive husband. She is originally from Uganda, and was recently granted her Indefinite Leave to Remain. Shortly after being put on IS, Susan was told she must move onto JSA due to the age of her daughter. Susan describes the move from IS to JSA as a big change, and one that caused her a lot of anxiety and worry. She is particularly concerned about the Job Centre asking her to attend an interview or appointment at a time when her child is not in school. She has no support locally from family or friends, and is scared of being sanctioned. Susan has worked in the past, and is keen to find part-time work, perhaps in retail. She is also keen to go to university to study counselling, and is making an application at the time of the first interview. For the future, Susan hopes to get off benefits and to be able to be there for her daughter and be able to provide for her.

During the research, Susan finds out that it is not possible for her to attend university as the fees will be too high (as she is treated as an international student). She continues to look for work, but without success, and finds this demoralising. Susan is referred onto the Work Programme and sent on a specific course 'launch pad' for single parents. She finds the course quite helpful, but is really disappointed when the promised placement does not materialise. Susan manages to find her own placement with a charity that has been supporting her. Susan also decides to re-train as a teaching assistant; as she thinks that this role might be better combined with her responsibilities to her daughter. By the end of the research, she has started a part-time course, and is also volunteering two days a week at her daughter's school in order to gain relevant experience. She says she would still like to be a counsellor, but is now thinking of this as a long-term ambition. She is also very keen to move house as her current property has very bad damp, and this is getting her down.

Terri is in her late 30s and lives in a housing association property with her husband, John. Terri describes her husband as a 'Jekyll and Hyde' character, who can be nice one minute and then very unpleasant. He uses crack cocaine and misuses alcohol, and sometimes self-harms when he is intoxicated. He is unfaithful to Terri, and also gets her into debt by using her debit card to visit dating websites and to order contract phones. As a result, Terri is in substantial debt and is very anxious about her husband and the state of their relationship.

Terri has never worked, and has been on IB from the age of 16. She lives with epilepsy, depression and agoraphobia, and is now waiting to be reassessed for ESA. Recently, her benefits were stopped when her agoraphobia meant that she failed to attend a WCA to determine her eligibility for ESA. After Terri went to her GP, and wrote a letter to WCA provider, Atos, her benefits were re-instated, but she is now waiting anxiously to see what will happen next. She used to receive DLA, but this was terminated in 2008 when she changed GPs and her new doctor did not support her claim. Recently, Terri made a fresh DLA claim that has been rejected, and she is now waiting for the outcome of the appeal. In the future, Terri hopes things will improve with her husband and she would also like her DLA to be reinstated as then she might be better able to manage financially.

Tessa (LSMP) is in her 40s and lives with her partner, **Jim**, in a social housing flat. She has lived there for about six years and quite likes where she lives. Tess has paranoid schizophrenia and is not able to leave her house on her own. She is thus very dependent on the support she receives from her partner, **Jim**, her father, who lives close by and a Community Psychiatric Nurse and Health Support Worker who visit weekly on alternate weeks. Tessa is currently on DLA and has just been reassessed for ESA. She completed the initial questionnaire, and has been notified that she has been placed in the WRAG. The Job Centre has contacted her to ask her to attend a WFI. Tessa hasn't been into the city centre in over five years, and is worried and stressed about her benefits situation.

Tessa has been on benefits since 2003, when she was admitted to hospital following an attempted overdose. Up until 2001, Tessa was in full-time work, and has had a number of quite senior civil service roles. At the moment, Tessa does not think work is a realistic aspiration although she would like to return to work if her health were to improve. She would also like to lose weight, cut down on her smoking and marry Jim, something they cannot afford while they are both on benefits.

During the research, Tessa appeals the ESA decision, with input from her health support workers and her psychiatrist. The appeal is successful and Tessa is placed in the SG. This is a relief to Tessa, who had been getting very stressed about the changes. However, in her third interview Tessa explains that just three months after being placed in the SG she received a letter saying her benefits would be reassessed again. This causes her further upset and anxiety, though at first she assumed they must have made a mistake. In the event, Tessa was again placed in the SG, which was a big relief. However, she now worries about when she will be reassessed next. She has managed to lose weight, and has started swimming, and is really pleased about this. However, Tessa's health, and that of her partner, Jim, has been worse recently, which is making life more difficult.

Appendix Four: Vignettes

Jobseeker (W1)

Tom is 19. He has been out of work since he left school. He was sent on a Best course last year but that didn't help much. He's been to the Job Centre and they've told him that he must go on a four week work experience programme. He might be cleaning the streets, or helping tidy up graffiti. The work experience is full time and if he doesn't go he might have his benefits stopped for three months.

Jobseeker (W3)

Mark is nineteen years old and out of work. He's not been working since he left school, apart from a job he got for a few weeks on a building site. He's been on the Work Programme but did not find it that helpful in getting him a job. The job centre has now told him that he needs to go on a work experience programme for eight weeks at a local DIY store. He likes it at first, but then he gets fed up as he feels that the work is boring and he is not learning anything new. When he tells the job centre he wants to quit the placement, they tell him his benefits will be stopped if he does so.

Single Parent (W1)

Stacey is twenty three and a lone mother of two children. Her oldest, Josh, is seven and her youngest, Suzie, is just about to start school in the Autumn. She goes to the Job Centre about her Income Support. They tell her that when Suzie starts school Stacey will not be able to claim Income Support anymore. Instead she will have to change to Job Seeker's Allowance. This will also mean that she will need to start looking for work, and applying for jobs or risk facing benefit cuts. She might have to go on a course about returning to work, or apply for jobs that the Job Centre finds for her. If Stacey doesn't do what the Job Centre tells her she might find her benefits are stopped altogether.

Single Parent (W3)

Hazel is twenty seven and has two daughters aged nine and five. Since the youngest (Donna) started school, Hazel has been moved from Income Support onto Jobseeker's Allowance. This means that Hazel has to look for work as a condition of getting her benefits. She does not really want to work - yet - as she'd rather wait until her children are a bit older. She's decided the best thing to do is to pretend to apply for jobs to keep the job centre happy, but really she's not trying hard at all. She does get scared sometimes that the job centre will find out, and maybe try and

stop her money. But she's decided it's worth the risk as she wants to put her children – and looking after them – first.

Disabled person (W1)

Mike is 48 and has been on Incapacity Benefit for eight years. He suffers from depression, and finds it difficult to get out of bed most mornings. This is made worse by his arthritis which means he finds it hard to get about and struggles with simple tasks. Three months ago, because of changes to benefits Mike was sent for a medical to check if he should get the replacement to Incapacity Benefit – Employment and Support Allowance. At the medical, they decided Mike is fit for work and should start looking for jobs immediately. He was moved on to Job Seeker's Allowance where he has to actively seek work or risk his benefits being stopped. Mike finds this really hard as he often misses appointments due to his depression and his arthritis. One day the Job Centre tells him they are stopping his benefits for three months because he didn't apply for a job that they told him he should apply for.

Disabled person (W3)

Charlie is thirty two and suffering from serious mental health problems. He hears voices, and often gets serious panic attacks which make it difficult to leave the house. He recently went for an assessment to see if he is entitled to the new disability benefit, Employment and Support Allowance. He has been placed in the work-related activity group because the medical found him to have some limited capability to work. This means that Charlie must participate in back-to-work activities with the Job Centre or risk benefit sanctions. Charlie is finding this really stressful and scary as he struggles to make appointments, and is terrified that he will get a sanction.