

**The implications of Universal Credit for
women's citizenship:
An investigation into the experiences
and views of mothers subject to
conditionality**

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Abstract

The introduction of Universal Credit, a means-tested benefit for working age people in the UK, constitutes radical welfare reform and entails a significant intensification and expansion of welfare conditionality. Numerically, women are disproportionately affected by the conditionality regime for main carers of children within Universal Credit. Under this new benefit, couples have to nominate as “lead carer” the person in the household primarily responsible for the care of the dependent children. Lone parents are automatically designated the “lead carer”. The lead carer is subject to different levels of work-related requirements depending on the age of the youngest child and faces sanctions for non-compliance. To investigate how the conditionality within Universal Credit affects the valuing of unpaid care, women’s employment trajectories, women’s agency and ultimately women’s citizenship status, a qualitative longitudinal study was carried out. Two rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted with a group of mothers subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit which explored over time their experiences of, and views on, this new conditionality regime.

The resultant findings demonstrate that the conditionality within Universal Credit exacerbates women’s marginalised position in dominant gendered citizenship frameworks. By making social rights dependent on more intensive and extended paid work-related behaviour, the conditionality demands women undertake paid work as their active citizenship contribution and further devalues unpaid care. However, this policy does not facilitate mothers’ entrance into the types of paid work that would enable them to obtain full citizenship status in its current gendered form. It also further constrains mothers’ choices about engagement in paid work and unpaid care and can compel them to act against their volition, thereby exacerbating the limitations placed on women’s agency. This thesis ultimately calls for social security benefits to be designed and delivered in ways that enhance, rather than undermine, women’s citizenship status and practice.

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I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The introduction of Universal Credit in the UK is purported to be the most significant change to the social security system since the 1940s (McVey, 2018; DWP, 2010c). It is a far reaching new social security benefit: in 2018 it was estimated that when fully implemented, Universal Credit would affect just under seven million households (Kennedy and Keen, 2018). As these numbers were estimated before the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 which has seen a huge surge in claims, it is likely these figures will be revised upwards. Given longstanding issues with the legacy benefits system, the ideas behind Universal Credit, and specifically the aims to simplify the benefits system and make work pay, initially received widespread support (for example, Work and Pensions Committee, 2012; Citizens Advice, 2011; Sainsbury, 2010). However, over time, as the phased roll-out of Universal Credit has gathered pace, it has come under increasing criticism (for example, Economic Affairs Committee, 2020; Alston, 2019; National Audit Office, 2018) and there is mounting evidence of the multiple ways in which this benefit can cause significant hardship to those claiming it (Patrick and Simpson, 2020; Robertson, Wright and Stewart, 2020; Wickham et al., 2020; Cheetham et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2018).

One aspect of Universal Credit policy which has attracted criticism is the new conditionality regime for main carers of children (termed 'lead carers' in the government literature) within Universal Credit. This thesis focuses on the implications of this new conditionality regime for women's citizenship. Key concerns raised in the academic literature relate to the valuing of unpaid care, women's position in the paid labour market and their agency regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work (for example, Millar, 2019; Cain, 2016; MacLeavy, 2011). These concerns are all relevant to women's citizenship and echo those raised in the wider literature on welfare conditionality and gender (for example, Grabham and Smith, 2010; Conaghan, 2009; MacLeavy, 2007). However there has been a lack of empirical research investigating whether the criticisms are reflected in the

experiences and views of mothers subject to the new conditionality regime. This formed a key motivation for the study particularly given the pre-existing devaluation of women's unpaid caring roles, women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market and the historical ways in which women have been denied agency, and more broadly, women's routinely precarious citizenship status (see Chapter 2.2). To investigate these gender concerns, a detailed review of the literature and policy was carried out to explore the relevant theories, arguments and research related to the conditionality within Universal Credit. Subsequently, a qualitative longitudinal study was conducted from 2018-2019 which investigated over time the views and experiences of mothers subject to the conditionality regime for main carers of children within Universal Credit. This thesis makes an original contribution to the literature by showing the gendered impacts of the conditionality within Universal Credit and exploring the implications of this conditionality regime for women's citizenship by providing analysis of new empirical evidence generated in the fieldwork.

This introductory chapter sets out the context, key concepts, investigative focus and structure of the thesis. Section 1.2 introduces Universal Credit and the changing context of its roll-out, discusses welfare reforms that have been implemented alongside Universal Credit and highlights the gendered dimension to these reforms. Section 1.3 explains how the concepts of social citizenship, welfare conditionality, unpaid work and agency have been understood and used in this thesis. Section 1.4 presents the overarching research aim, the research objectives and the research questions and Section 1.5 provides an overview of the thesis structure by giving a summary of each chapter.

1.2 Universal Credit, austerity and gender

Universal Credit is a new means-tested social security benefit for working age people in the UK. It is paid monthly in arrears. Awards are made up of a standard allowance and there are additional elements (including a per child element, a childcare costs element and a housing element) that can be added to this. Universal Credit merges six legacy in-work and out-of-work benefits into a single benefit and is therefore paid to people out of work and to those in low-paid work. It combines

Working Tax Credit (WTC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Income Support (IS), Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Housing Benefit. These different benefits are the most recent incarnations of a range of out-of-work benefits, low wage supplements, rent subsidies and tax credits that have a long history and have been introduced at different points in time, largely to provide new strands of support on top of what already existed (Browne, Hood, and Joyce, 2016). The separate and at times overlapping means-tested benefits within the UK social security system have resulted in a complicated system which the introduction of Universal Credit attempts to address, but not without considerable problems (see Chapter 3.2).

The phased, and much delayed, roll-out of Universal Credit began in 2013 and is expected to be complete by 2024 (House of Commons Library, 2020). Therefore, this new benefit was initially introduced under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government (2010-2015) and its implementation has been continued under the Conservative governments of 2015, 2017 and 2019. During the prolonged roll-out, there have been seven different Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions to date and also many changes in Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) senior civil service officials. The economic context of the implementation of Universal Credit has also changed since the inception of this new benefit. Universal Credit was conceived and designed during, and in the years immediately after, the financial crisis of 2008. Following this, there was a period of record employment; however, there was also a dramatic drop in real average earnings during this period (Finch, 2015b). The coronavirus pandemic has significantly changed the context once again due to the severe negative impacts this has had on the economy and paid labour market. Additionally, multiple changes were made to Universal Credit itself between its inception and implementation and there have been a series of other key changes during the phased roll-out of Universal Credit to date (see Chapter 3.2).

Universal Credit has been introduced in the context of a programme of austerity implemented by the Coalition government and the subsequent Conservative governments. While this programme of austerity nominally ended in 2018 and there has been a dramatic increase in government spending due to the coronavirus pandemic, many of the measures affecting the social security system introduced

during the period of austerity remain. The austerity programme involved making cuts to working-age public social expenditure ostensibly to reduce the public sector deficit but also to alter the role and size of the welfare state (Edmiston, 2018; Taylor-Gooby, 2012). Therefore, alongside the introduction of Universal Credit, there have been several other key changes to the social security system which have increasingly affected Universal Credit claimants (Economic Affairs Committee, 2020). Key welfare reforms have included introducing a benefit cap, a two-child limit and a benefits freeze (Kennedy, Keen and Wilson, 2017). The benefit cap was introduced in 2013 and further reduced in 2016. It limits the total amount of benefits a household can receive. The two-child limit was introduced in 2017. Under this policy, families no longer receive child elements in CTCs and Universal Credit for third or subsequent children born on or after 6 April 2017. From 2016 to 2020 there was a freeze on the value of most working-age benefits including Universal Credit. Over the past decade there have also been some increases in the generosity of the welfare, wage and tax systems such as the increase in personal tax allowance, the introduction of the National Living Wage and the increase in help towards formal childcare costs. However, those who benefit the most from the introduction of the National Living Wage and the increased personal tax allowances are not necessarily the same people as those who experience reductions in income due to cuts to Universal Credit and Tax Credits (De Henau, 2018).

As commentators have pointed out, there are gendered impacts of austerity policies (Durbin, Page and Walby, 2017; Rubery and Rafferty, 2014; MacLeavy, 2011). Women have been disproportionately affected by public spending cuts in social security benefits, including Universal Credit, as women are more likely to be in receipt of such benefits (Richards-Gray, 2020; Rubery and Rafferty, 2014). A key reason for women's reliance on social security benefits is their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care (Richards-Gray, 2020). For example, the majority of lone parents are female and lone parenthood particularly gives rise to receipt of social security benefits (Reis, 2018; Conaghan, 2009). Analysis by the Women's Budget Group has found that by 2021/2022, employed lone mothers in receipt of Universal Credit will lose on average £4933 per year if changes to the tax, wage and welfare systems are assessed together, and unemployed lone mothers will lose £7000 per year (De Henau, 2018, p.4). Therefore, the introduction of the new

conditionality regime within Universal Credit, the focus of this thesis, has taken place in the context of gendered welfare reforms which have weakened women's social protection.

1.3 Key concepts

There are a number of key concepts that are relevant to the investigation of the new conditionality regime for main carers of children within Universal Credit, some of which are contested. This section presents a brief discussion of social citizenship, welfare conditionality, unpaid care and agency respectively to establish how these concepts have been understood and employed in this thesis.

1.3.1 Social citizenship

While citizenship is a contested and multidimensional concept (Abraham et al., 2010; Lister, 2007), a useful starting point is Marshall's (1950) highly influential discussion of citizenship. Marshall defined citizenship as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (1950, pp.28–29). The community referred to is the nation state and citizenship therefore concerns the relationship between individuals and the state, and also the relationships between individuals within their communities (Lister, 2003; Dwyer, 2000). Rights and responsibilities are key to this definition. Marshall identified three linked sets of rights: civil, political and social rights. This thesis is primarily concerned with social rights which are central to the notion of social citizenship (Dwyer, 2010). Social citizenship is predominantly about membership of the national community (Patrick, 2017) and the levels of, and access to, social rights are indicative of the status and position of individuals in that community (Dwyer, 2010). Of particular pertinence to women's citizenship and conditionality, there have been considerable debates over whether social rights or responsibilities should be prioritised, whether the two should be linked and the content and extent of these rights and responsibilities (Lister, 2003; Dwyer, 2000).

A key debate which is relevant to conditionality and that also highlights the difficult place women occupy in dominant citizenship theories regards the liberal and the civic republican approaches to citizenship. Under liberal theory, citizenship is conceptualised as a status and this approach prioritises the rights of the individual citizen (Lister, 2003). However, responsibilities (including the responsibility to undertake paid work) can be demanded of citizens in return for rights, and there is an emphasis on the contract between the state and the individual (Patrick, 2017). Whereas the starting position for liberal theory is citizens' rights, the civic republican approach views citizenship as a practice and prioritises the interests of the community (Lister, 2003). The emphasis is on citizens' duties, especially the obligation to undertake paid work. Both the contractual, liberal concept of citizenship as a status with attached rights and responsibilities and the civic republican notion of citizenship as a practice which demands the fulfilment of obligations have been used to justify the implementation of conditionality in the UK (Patrick, 2017). Problematically, both of these citizenship approaches have been criticised for excluding women by defining citizenship in masculine terms (Abraham et al., 2010).

While rights and responsibilities are central to definitions of citizenship, there are also less tangible aspects of citizenship including inclusion and exclusion, participation, belonging, identity, recognition and social positioning (Roseneil, Halsaa and Sümer, 2012; Abraham et al., 2010; Lister, 2007, 2003; Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 2005). These in part arise from the ways in which welfare states distribute social security payments, as in doing so, they institutionalise gendered norms of entitlement and construct unequally valued social positions and identities for claimants (Fraser, 1998). Halsaa, Roseneil and Sümer explain in relation to the less tangible aspects of citizenship, that the study of citizenship must also "be concerned with...the lack of capacity to exercise responsibility and agency, legal non-personhood, non-participation and exclusion, and subjective experiences of outsider-status and non-belonging" (2012, p.3). These aspects of citizenship are particularly pertinent to women's citizenship as women have routinely held a precarious position in dominant citizenship frameworks in part due to their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care (see Chapter 2.2) and as a result have been disadvantaged not only materially but also in regard to their capacity to exercise agency, participate, belong and hold equal social standing with men.

Given the above understanding of social citizenship, this concept is a key avenue for exploring welfare belongings, rights and responsibilities (Lewis, 1998). It is also useful for analysing women's unequal position in society (Lister, 2003; Dwyer, 2000). The focus of this thesis is citizenship as it relates to motherhood. While not all women inhabit the identity of 'mother', motherhood is significant in the life courses of many women and is key in shaping their position in dominant citizenship frameworks (Lister, 2003). Through investigating the conditionality within Universal Credit, this thesis explores how current UK social security policy conceptualises citizenship responsibilities and links them to social rights, and the impacts this has on women, especially in regard to their inclusion, recognition, identity and social positioning.

The specific focus of the thesis on the citizenship rights and responsibilities of women in relation to unpaid care and paid work is only one aspect of women's citizenship status and practice, and there is a much broader context of ongoing citizenship struggles for inclusion (Balibar, 2015; Clarke et al. 2014). There are various sites of struggle as there are different sets and sources of rights attached to citizenship. These include political, civil, cultural and reproductive, as well as social, rights (Lister, 2003). It is possible to be entitled to some rights but not to others and there can also be a blurring between different sets of rights (Clarke et al., 2014). The various sites of struggle give rise to different ways in which people can be excluded (Clarke et al., 2014). Correspondingly, there is a spectrum of inclusion and it is possible to be neither fully included nor fully excluded (Balibar, 2015). As well as a range of citizenship rights, there is also a range of social rights in addition to the rights to social security payments for working age people who are unemployed or on low incomes. Therefore, there are other state-provided benefits and services, apart from Universal Credit, that affect women's social citizenship such as the right to a state-provided pension. Consequently, the discussion in this thesis is part of a larger and evolving context (Balibar, 2015) which affects women's citizenship rights and inequalities in citizenship status.

1.3.2 Welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions

Welfare conditionality has been applied to various aspects of welfare provision including the social security system, education, health and housing (Deacon, 2004;

Watts, et al., 2014). The focus of this thesis is the use of welfare conditionality within the social security system. As Dwyer explains, this “links eligibility to continued receipt of work related benefits to claimants’ mandatory engagement with work focused interviews (WFIs), training and support schemes and/or job search requirements” (2018b, p.142). Conditionality within the social security system is enforced by benefit sanctions (the reduction or complete withdrawal of benefit payment for perceived non-compliance with work-related requirements). The common aim of implementing welfare conditionality is to change behaviour, and in the context of the social security system, the desired behaviour change is movement off benefits and into paid work (Dwyer, 2019). Over the past thirty to forty years, access to benefits in the UK has become more conditional on work-related requirements, including for groups previously exempt such as people with disabilities and lone parents (Etherington and Daguerre, 2015; Watts et al., 2014; Griggs and Bennett, 2009). The increased application of welfare conditionality is not limited to the UK but has also occurred across much of Europe, North America and Australasia (Curchin, 2017; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b; Griggs and Evans, 2010) and is actively encouraged by the EU and OECD (Griggs and Bennett, 2009; Aust and Arriba, 2005). However, different approaches to conditionality are taken across these countries and regions, with varying responsibilities and sanctions regimes adopted (Griggs and Evans, 2010; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b; Griggs and Bennett, 2009). This thesis specifically examines welfare conditionality within the UK’s Universal Credit system, considered the most extensive and intensive application of conditionality in the UK to date (Wright and Dwyer, 2020; Dwyer and Wright, 2014). Throughout this thesis, welfare conditionality within the social security system is referred to simply as 'conditionality' and similarly benefit sanctions are referred to as 'sanctions'.

1.3.3 Unpaid care

The use of terminology to describe care provided to a family member that is not financially remunerated has been the subject of debate. While some have defined unpaid care as work (for example, Lynch and Lyons, 2009b), others have questioned the application of this term to mothers' caring activities (for example, Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002). Describing unpaid care as work is advantageous in

that it gives recognition to the labour involved in caring for children, the skills and knowledge needed and the individual and societal outcomes of good care (Lynch and Lyons, 2009b). However, defining unpaid care as work essentially entails using a masculine concept to describe an activity primarily carried out by women and therefore risks imposing on women a male individualist concept of work that may contradict their own understanding of their activities, relationships and identities (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002). Regardless of whether the term 'work' is used to define unpaid care, there is widespread agreement that unpaid care not only involves physical and mental tasks but also entails relationships, morals and emotions (Williams, 2012; Lynch and Lyons, 2009b; Lynch and Walsh, 2009; Lewis and Giullari, 2005; Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002). It is therefore distinct from paid care because these emotional and relational values cannot be "simulated nor bought on a simple hire and fire basis" (Lynch and Lyons, 2009b, p.75). As unpaid care is multifaceted, it involves considerable effort, time and emotional and physical energy. It can be both a joy and a burden (Lynch and Walsh, 2009). This thesis explores the valuing of unpaid care in the Universal Credit system and dominant citizenship frameworks, and contrasts this with the value mothers place on it. Given the questions concerning defining unpaid care purely as work, in this thesis, the concept of unpaid care is understood to entail work but also to have a distinctly relational and affective orientation and therefore the term 'unpaid care' rather than 'unpaid care work' has been used to refer to care provided to a family member.

1.3.4 Agency

Agency refers to the ability to determine one's own daily life (Annesley, 2007) and relates to the capacity for free choice (McNay, 2016; Wright, 2012; Lister, 2003; Gould, 1983). However, agency is exercised within a social context and is influenced by social norms, interpersonal relationships, environments and relations of power (McNay, 2016; Wright, 2012). Therefore, while agency has the potential to promote freedom of choice, such choice is always limited to some extent and to different degrees depending in part on an individual's position in hierarchical social power relationships (Lister, 2004). Women face particular constraints on their agency (see Chapter 2.2.3) and vary in their ability to exercise agency as this can be

limited by factors such as class, poverty, race, ethnicity, disability and age (Bergman et al., 2012; Lister, 2003). The social context of agency not only affects ability to exercise choice but also the ways in which choices are made. As Wright (2012) explains, people do not act on a solely individual basis as everyone is connected to other people; as a result, people rarely make decisions in isolation but instead take into account the needs and interests of those closest to them. This highlights interdependency (see Chapter 2.2.2) which is significant to women who remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid care and are therefore particularly likely to take into account the needs of others when making decisions (McNay, 2016). The social aspect of agency is also very relevant to investigations of conditionality given the assumptions regarding individualised decision making within welfare-to-work policies (see Chapter 2.3.3). More broadly, the concept of agency is very important to the study of social security policy as claimants face increasing constraints on their agency yet have routinely been mischaracterised as passive victims of welfare reform (Finn, 2018). Therefore, this thesis seeks to explore both the extent to which the conditionality within Universal Credit affects mothers' agency and also how mothers respond to this.

1.4 Research aim, objectives and questions

The overarching aim of the study was to explore the potential implications for women's citizenship of the conditionality for main carers of children within Universal Credit through investigating over time the perspectives and experiences of lone and coupled mothers subject to this conditionality regime. This thesis sought to achieve this by investigating whether the gender concerns raised in the literature relating to the valuing of unpaid care, women's position in the paid labour market and women's agency were realised in the lives of mothers subject to this policy measure. There were three research objectives:

1. To consider the implications of the conditionality for 'lead carers' within Universal Credit for the valuing of unpaid care in the Universal Credit system.
2. To explore the implications of the conditionality for 'lead carers' within Universal Credit for women's position in the paid labour market.

3. To explore over time how the conditionality for 'lead carers' within Universal Credit affects mothers' agency in relation to engagement in unpaid care and paid work.

These led to three related research questions:

1. How, and why, does the conditionality for 'lead carers' within Universal Credit affect women's roles and responsibilities regarding unpaid care across time?
2. How does the conditionality for 'lead carers' within Universal Credit affect mothers' employment trajectories in respect of whether they obtain and sustain paid work and the types of paid work they obtain?
3. To what extent do mothers experience compulsion through being subject to the welfare conditionality within Universal Credit and how do they respond to it over time?

As evident from the overarching research aim, the study prioritised the accounts of the mothers and sought to obtain lived experiences of welfare reform. This was considered crucial given that qualitative research investigating claimants' experiences and views was sidelined during the policy formation of Universal Credit (Bennett and Sung, 2014) and also given the pre-existence of concerns that there is a mismatch between the assumptions underpinning the design of Universal Credit and claimants' everyday lives (Millar and Bennett, 2017). As indicated by the research aim, objectives and questions above, the participants' experiences and views were explored over time. This was enabled by the employment of qualitative longitudinal research which is useful for analysing change (or the absence thereof) and also for observing how people experience, manage, respond to, and are impacted by, change (see Chapter 4.4). It was therefore appropriate to the study of Universal Credit which not only constitutes a significant change in the social security system but also has the contested aim of changing claimants' behaviours and attitudes.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis establishes the theoretical context of the study. It comprises two sections that explore women's citizenship and welfare conditionality respectively. The first section discusses the dominant gendered conception of citizenship, presents the difficulties of creating a more gender inclusive citizenship framework and suggests a potential way forward. The second section outlines the history of conditionality in the UK and discusses both the justifications and objections to this policy measure. The chapter concludes by presenting the ways in which subjecting mothers to conditionality may work against aims to create a more gender inclusive citizenship framework. Chapter 3 turns to the policy context of the study and also has two sections. It starts with a section that explores the history of Universal Credit, the contested aims and assumptions underpinning it and its design and delivery. The second section of this chapter explores the new conditionality regime within Universal Credit for main carers of children. It outlines the history of conditionality for lone and coupled mothers, details the conditionality regime for mothers within Universal Credit and presents the research concerning Universal Credit and gender to date. Following on from this, it focuses on gender concerns raised in the literature regarding the new conditionality regime that relate to women's citizenship and presents the need to investigate these concerns.

Chapter 4 discusses the methods used to investigate the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's citizenship. The chapter begins by outlining the theoretical orientation of the study. It then explains and justifies the qualitative research design and the qualitative longitudinal approach which entailed two waves of semi-structured interviews with mothers subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit. From there, the chapter gives an account of the methods of recruitment, data collection, sample maintenance, analysis and dissemination. The final sections of the chapter describe the ways in which ethical considerations and research quality were addressed. This chapter highlights how the participants' accounts were prioritised throughout the study.

Chapters 5 to 7 present analysis of the original data generated in the qualitative longitudinal fieldwork. Chapter 5 details the implications of the conditionality within

Universal Credit for the valuing of unpaid care. It explores the extent to which caring responsibilities were taken into account during the Universal Credit claim, the effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit on the mothers' caring responsibilities and their views on whether unpaid care is valued within the Universal Credit system. This chapter concludes by discussing how the new conditionality regime within Universal Credit affects the valuing of unpaid care as a valid citizenship contribution. Chapter 6 explores the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's position in the paid labour market. It discusses the participants' paid work aspirations and barriers to paid work, the formal childcare provision within Universal Credit, the support the participants received in obtaining paid work, and the participants' experiences of trying to meet paid work requirements. It then investigates the effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit on the participants' employment and earnings over time. Lastly, this chapter reflects on how the limited efficacy of the conditionality regime within Universal Credit affects women's citizenship status. Chapter 7 focuses on the effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit on mothers' agency. It investigates the extent to which the participants' work-related requirements were negotiated, their experiences of compulsion over time and their views on the compulsion within Universal Credit. The chapter then explores the participants' responses to the compulsion within Universal Credit and the overall impacts of the compulsion on their agency regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work. To finish, this chapter discusses the implications of the compulsion within Universal Credit for women's ability to carry out unpaid care and paid work and, more broadly, the implications for their citizenship status.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis. After summarising the overall research findings, it discusses the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's citizenship. It then outlines the arising policy recommendations for the Universal Credit conditionality regime specifically, and government policy more broadly, aimed at promoting a more gender inclusive citizenship framework. From there, it outlines the contributions and limitations of the study and makes suggestions for future research. This chapter concludes by articulating how the conditionality within Universal Credit exacerbates women's marginalised position in dominant gendered

citizenship frameworks and highlights the importance of seeking and incorporating the views of claimants when devising welfare reform.

Chapter 2: Theoretical context: Women's citizenship and welfare conditionality

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to women's citizenship and welfare conditionality. The first section explores women's marginalised position in citizenship frameworks and potential means of addressing this. In light of the first section, the second section discusses the debates and current research concerning the increasing implementation of conditionality in the UK. This review illustrates that conditionality has the potential to impact women's roles as unpaid carers, their position in the paid labour market, their agency and ultimately their citizenship status. While concerns have been raised in the literature about the application of conditionality to mothers, there is a limited amount of empirical research demonstrating whether these concerns are realised in the lives of mothers subject to conditionality.

2.2 Women's citizenship

This section reviews the literature relevant to women's citizenship. Section 2.2.1 outlines women's historically disadvantaged citizenship status. Section 2.2.2 presents difficulties and dilemmas in engendering citizenship and Section 2.2.3 discusses a potential way of creating a more gender inclusive citizenship framework.

2.2.1 Gendered citizenship

Historically and currently, women have routinely been marginalised in dominant citizenship frameworks (Lister, 2003; Hancock, 2000; Cass, 1994; Pateman, 1989). Marshall's (1950) influential concept of citizenship has been criticised for failing to consider gender and the importance of unpaid care (Lister, 2003; Tronto, 2001; Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Walby, 1994). Marshall depicted paid work as the primary duty of citizenship, a duty he confined to men (Pateman, 2005) and consequently, the social rights he extolled could easily be extended to men (Pateman, 1989). In Marshall's

time, there was an assumption that women (married women in particular) would undertake unpaid care and men would provide for the family through undertaking paid work (Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Vogel, 1991; Pateman, 1989). Marshall's concept of the citizen has had a long-lasting impact. As Tronto explains, the "discourse on citizenship in welfare states has followed the lead of T.H. Marshall in identifying citizens primarily as workers" (2001, p.67). Thus citizenship is still viewed in masculine terms and citizens are conceived as economically independent wage earners who are unencumbered by familial ties (Orloff, 2009; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Cass, 1994). Unpaid care has not been viewed as an integral component of citizenship and as such women's caring roles have been devalued (Lynch and Lyons, 2009a; Hancock, 2000). While historically there has been some recognition of mothers' caring roles in the form of unconditional social assistance granted on the basis of their caring responsibilities (Davies, 2015; Daly, 2011), this has been at an inferior level (Lister, 2003; Orloff, 1993). In welfare regimes, wage earners have been privileged over unpaid carers resulting in second-class social rights for many women (Lister, 2003).

Due to significant changes in family demographics and women's increased participation in the paid labour market, there is a very different contemporary societal context to that of the 1950s when Marshall introduced his pioneering concept of citizenship. Over the past thirty years there has been a growing diversity of family forms which has included increases in cohabiting couple families, lone parent families and blended families (Falkingham, Evandrou and Vlachantoni, 2014). Since the 1950s there has been a decrease in marriage rates with couples increasingly opting to cohabit (Office for National Statistics, 2020). There has also been an increase in the divorce rate particularly since the 1970s following on from changes in divorce law (Rafferty, 2014). The increase in the divorce rate along with the increase in births to women who have never married have led to an increase in lone parent families (Falkingham, Evandrou and Vlachantoni, 2014). The birth rate has fluctuated over the past seventy years. While there was a peak in 2012, the birth rate for 2018 in England and Wales was the lowest ever recorded (Office for National Statistics, 2019a). Changes in fertility rates by age group indicate that women are progressively delaying childrearing to older ages (Office for National Statistics, 2019a).

The demographic changes have been accompanied by changes in women's participation in the paid labour market. Since the 1970s women have increasingly entered paid employment (Roantree and Vira, 2018). There was a steep rise in the 1980s and women's employment rate has risen almost continuously since then (Roantree and Vira, 2018). However, despite women's increasing participation in the paid labour market, considerable gender inequalities are prevalent (Nightingale, 2020). Persistent gender inequality in the paid labour market is evident in the gender pay gap and the disproportionate representation of women in precarious jobs which do not confer social security rights (Jensen and Møberg, 2017; Bowlby et al., 2010; Grant, 2009). Women are more likely to be in occupations that are associated with low pay such as caring, cleaning and catering (Reis, 2018). Some feminists have argued that such work is poorly remunerated and undervalued because it is viewed as 'feminine' and is therefore presumed to be inferior (for example, Lynch and Lyons, 2009a; Fraser, 1998). Women are also under-represented in higher-level positions that pay more within occupations (Reis, 2018) and are less likely to progress to higher paying work (D'Arcy and Finch, 2017). Additionally, women are increasingly undertaking self-employed work which is often accompanied by low pay, limited options for training and a lack of social protection (De Henau, Harris and Stephenson, 2018).

Mothers are particularly susceptible to a disadvantaged labour market position: while women earn about ten percent less than men before they have children, the gender pay gap increases rapidly for many women after they have children (Costa Dias, Joyce and Parodi, 2018). Despite demographic and labour market changes, and some slight shifts in men's engagement in unpaid care, women remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid care (Neitzert, 2020; Jupp et al., 2019; Boyer et al., 2017). Consequently, mothers are more likely than fathers to fit their working hours around caring responsibilities (Bennett and Daly, 2014; Orloff, 2009) and have a greater propensity to be economically inactive or to engage in part-time paid work (Reis, 2018; Bennett and Daly, 2014). Part-time work in the UK tends to be low-paid, low status, insecure and segregated into gendered occupations, and often results in limited carer development and inadequate pensions (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Lister, 2003; Williams, 2001).

Other demographic characteristics apart from motherhood, such as class, ethnicity and disability, intersect with gender inequalities to produce different experiences among women. Whereas middle class women have tended to move into reasonably well-paid occupations and professions, working class women have taken less well-paid, more precarious jobs (McDowell and Dyson, 2011). Working class women's greater entrance into some of the most disadvantaged positions in the paid labour market has been linked to their constrained educational opportunities and lower qualifications (Walters, 2005; Warren, 2000). Racial discrimination and bias also compound gender inequalities: women from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds are less likely to be employed than White women even when qualifications are taken into account and are more likely to be in low-paid jobs (Reis, 2018). Additionally, there is an employment gap between disabled and non-disabled women (Office for National Statistics, 2019b). Therefore, while gender inequalities are experienced across the demographic spectrum, they take different forms and are more severe for some women than others due to their intersection with other structures of inequality (Neitzert, 2020).

In addition to changes in demographics and women's labour market participation, government assumptions regarding gender roles have also changed. Since the late twentieth century there has been a marked shift away from the assumptions of a male breadwinner and a female carer prevalent in the 1950s towards assumptions of an adult worker model wherein both men and women are in paid work (Lewis, 2002). While under the breadwinner model there was some recognition in the social security system—in the form of low levels of out-of-work support—of the impact of mothers' unpaid caring responsibilities on their ability to participate in the paid labour market (Davies, 2015; Orloff, 2006), under the adult worker model women are expected to undertake paid work. This change in expectations is evident in the increasing application of conditionality in the UK to both lone and coupled mothers (see Chapter 3.3) and other policies aimed at increasing women's labour market participation such as increases in formal childcare provision (McDowell, 2005). While the male breadwinner model entrenched women and men in traditional gender roles and reinforced women's economic dependence on men, the adult worker model may also be problematic for women. The shift towards the latter model has been based on male patterns of work and interaction with the paid labour market (Lewis and Giullari,

2005) and the gendered imbalance in responsibility for unpaid care has not been adequately addressed. For example, while there have been policies aimed at reconciling paid work and unpaid care, these have been focused on women rather than both men and women (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). This results in dual expectations of paid work and unpaid care for women (Conaghan, 2009). Additionally, the importance of unpaid care to society and many women's identities, and women's weaker labour market position have not been adequately taken into account within the adult worker model (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Ingold and Etherington, 2013; Conaghan, 2009).

As demonstrated above, the assumptions around family formation and women's roles prevalent in Marshall's time are not relevant today. However, despite these changes in family demographics and women's labour market participation, women remain primarily responsible for unpaid care. Therefore, current assumptions regarding women's roles also fail to reflect social reality by overestimating the extent to which women can engage in paid work and also sideline the necessary unpaid caring roles women continue to carry out (Lewis, 2002). Citizenship status continues to be based upon paid work and unpaid care is still not considered to be a valid citizenship contribution. While women have entered the paid labour market in significant numbers, due to persistent gender inequalities in the paid labour market in part caused by women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, women's citizenship status remains precarious (Lister, 2003). This particularly applies to women who experience multiple structures of inequality. However, attempts to reconceptualise citizenship to make it more inclusive of women have met with difficulties as discussed next.

2.2.2 Difficulties and dilemmas in engendering citizenship

Women have a more complicated relationship to citizenship than men because of the tension between their participation in the paid labour market and their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care (Cass, 1994). Women's dual responsibilities for unpaid care and paid work are related to their diverse and changing identities, and give rise to the different bases on which women's citizenship is pursued. Women have varying identities and these can change over the life

course (Lister, 2003). Skeggs explains in relation to the category of 'women': "Categories of singular identity are always uninhabitable because they assume a coherence, a homogeneity and fixity over time and space" (1997, p.166). The variation in women's identities is evident in research investigating women's orientations to paid work and unpaid care (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Duncan et al., 2003; Duncan and Edwards, 1999). This body of research found that women have varying perceptions of what it means to be a 'good mother' in relation to engagement in unpaid care and paid care broadly according to class, ethnicity, social context and geography. While some mothers view full-time engagement in the paid labour market as an essential part of 'good mothering' in terms of both providing a role model and meeting the family's financial needs, others prioritise care of their children over paid work as they consider their children need this maternal care. Duncan and Edwards (1999) also found that mothers' orientations to unpaid care and paid work (termed their 'gendered moral rationalities') are dynamic rather than fixed, demonstrating that individual identities can change over time.

The life course also gives rise to dynamism regarding women's identities and interactions with unpaid care and paid work. Caring responsibilities vary in intensity over time and women move in and out of paid work (Bowlby et al., 2010; Tomlinson, 2006). Longitudinal research conducted by Millar and Ridge (2020, 2017) over the course of fifteen years demonstrates the fluidity of lone mothers' interactions with unpaid care and paid work. The participants did not have a simple transition into paid work. Instead, they carried out voluntary work, unpaid care, agency work, short-term work and long-term work at various times. In addition, contrary to government assumptions regarding the static nature of relationship status, the lone parents' relationship status changed over time. As Wright explains, lone motherhood is "a transitional state" which is often followed by re-partnering or marriage (2011, p.72). Evidently, women's identities, engagement with unpaid care and paid work, and relationship status are diverse and fluid rather than fixed. This poses a challenge to engendering citizenship as it results in a diversity of claims for women's citizenship (Bergman et al., 2012). As there are varying interpretations of what it means to be a 'good mother' and also of concepts such as gender equality and feminism, different women's groups and organisations can have conflicting objectives. The diversity of women also makes forming and implementing social

policy difficult. Due to the lack of homogeneity among women and the different relationships different groups of women have to the welfare state, no single policy will necessarily advantage all women (Lister, 2003; Duncan and Smith, 2002).

A central dilemma in engendering citizenship concerns the different routes women pursue to obtain citizenship status. Pateman (1989) has articulated this tension, referring to it as 'Wollstonecraft's Dilemma' after the writer and philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), whereby there are two seemingly incompatible routes for obtaining full citizenship status. The first route entails demanding full and equal access to the paid labour market so that women can obtain citizenship status on the same terms as men through paid employment. The second route entails seeking citizenship status based on women's unique responsibilities and demands that unpaid care is valued as highly as paid work. Differing emphases have been placed on the two routes.

The dominant feminist approach to improving women's citizenship status is to work within the existing framework and therefore encourage women's participation in the paid labour market (Jensen and Møberg, 2017). Arguments in favour of this approach centre on the importance of paid work to women's economic security and independence. This is clearly important to single mothers who may not have access to a male wage and it is also important to coupled mothers. Economic dependence on men can result in power imbalances in couple relationships (Lister, 2000; Orloff, 1993). This can lead to a sense of deference and obligation, and a lack of bargaining power in family decisions (Lister, 2000; Hobson, 1990). This power imbalance may also affect the amount of control women have over the household resources and render them more vulnerable to poverty, which may remain invisible due to the measurement of poverty at the household level (Lister, 2003). Economic dependence on men can also reduce women's ability to exit unsatisfactory and abusive relationships because such a move may result in poverty (Hobson, 1990). Engaging in paid work is also important for securing economic independence in later years given the decreasing levels of state provided pensions and the increasing necessity of accruing an occupational pension.

While the welfare state can and does provide a measure of economic independence to women, and particularly lone parents, through the provision of child-related social security benefits, these have generally been at low levels only enabling women and their children to exist in relatively deprived conditions (Walby, 1994; Orloff, 1993). In addition, Walby (1994) argues that the development of social rights through the welfare state represents a shift from a private to a public patriarchy. As a result, some women have exchanged dependence on men for dependence on the state. While this shift has been important for changing gender relations between men and women, it still renders women subject to control. Of particular relevance to the increasing implementation of conditionality in the UK (see Section 2.3.1), the advantages of economic independence obtained through welfare provision depend in part on the way in which the state exercises power over those in receipt of benefits. Young explains,

People who depend on public subsidy or private charity to meet some or all of their needs must often submit to other people's judgments about their lives and actions—where they will live, how they will live, how they will spend money, what they will do with their time (1995, p.549).

Thus, some see participation in the paid labour market as a preferable route for women's pursuit of economic independence (Orloff, 1993).

In contrast to the above position, in seeking to create a more inclusive and comprehensive citizenship framework, other feminists such as Pateman (2005), Tronto (2001), Sevenhuijsen (2000) and Knijn and Kremer (1997) have argued that citizenship needs to be redefined to recognise the importance of unpaid care so that engaging in unpaid care confers citizenship status. This argument is primarily made on the grounds that every citizen both gives and receives care at some point in their lives. All humans need care when they are young and many will need it during old age and when seriously ill (Pateman, 2005; Knijn and Kremer, 1997). Care is not only universal and necessary but also highly valuable. Good care enables humans to flourish (Lewis and Giullari, 2005; Sevenhuijsen, 2000). It can affect people's ability to contribute in various spheres of life and relate to others (Lynch and Walsh, 2009). As Williams notes,

In providing and receiving care and support in conditions of mutual respect we learn and enact the practical ethics of being attentive to others: responsibility, trust, being adaptable and accommodating to others' differences, toleration for our own and others' frailty, and how to sustain and repair relationships (2004, p.76).

In addition to this social contribution, the provision of unpaid parental care makes an economic contribution to society both directly through saved government childcare costs and indirectly through the reproduction of the future labour force (Conaghan, 2009; Innes and Scott, 2003). According to the Office for National Statistics (2018), unpaid childcare in the UK was worth £352 billion in 2016.

A recognition of interdependency is crucial to establishing the value of care (Lynch and Lyons, 2009a). Some feminists have been highly critical of the view that independence, conceptualised in terms of economic self-sufficiency, is a prerequisite for citizenship, and of the labelling of men as 'independent' due to their participation in the paid labour market and women as 'dependent' on account of their financial dependence on men (Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Young, 1995; Fraser and Gordon, 1994; Pateman, 1989). The duality of 'independence' and 'dependence' within citizenship frameworks is a false dichotomy as every citizen is dependent on someone else in some form (Pateman, 2005; Knijn and Kremer, 1997). As such, the independent citizen is a "virtual, nonexistent human being" (Knijn and Kremer, 1997, p.352). Within citizenship frameworks, there has been a lack of attention to the ways in which men and the state are dependent upon women. Historically, men have relied, and continue to rely, upon women's unpaid domestic and caring activities in order to undertake paid work (Pateman, 2005; Tronto, 2001; Pearce, 1990). Thus those engaging in the paid labour market only gain 'independence' due to their dependence on those who carry out unpaid care (Pearce, 1990). Likewise, the welfare state has relied on women for providing care for the young, elderly and disabled people, and ensuring the continual reproduction of the labour force (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Pateman, 1989). This has resulted in a paradox wherein women with caring responsibilities have been marginalised from citizenship status for failing to contribute through paid work, when their non-participation in the paid labour market has been on account of the unpaid welfare

work they undertake (Cass, 1994; Pateman, 1989). As a result, there are demands for dismantling the dichotomy between men's 'independence' and women's 'dependence' and for a recognition of interdependency so that the contributions women make are valued and their citizenship status is elevated (Young, 1995; Pateman, 1989).

This dilemma regarding the two routes for pursuing women's citizenship remains problematic. As Lister explains, "a tension exists between the value I want to place on unpaid care work as an expression of citizenship responsibility and the emphasis I give to the importance of women's labour market participation to their citizenship" (2003, p.177). Different policies arise from the two options. Improving women's position in the paid labour market involves closing the gender pay gap, addressing gendered horizontal and vertical occupational segregation and promoting women's access to high quality paid employment alongside state provision of quality childcare (Annesley, Gains and Rummary, 2010; Lister, 2003; Cass, 1994; Orloff, 1993). On the other hand, recognising and valuing unpaid care requires the provision of caregiver allowances (Lynch and Walsh, 2009; Gillies, 2007; Pateman, 2005). The different routes for pursuing women's citizenship and their accompanying policies both have limitations.

While improving women's access and position in the paid labour market may reduce female poverty and increase women's economic independence and power, this approach also has deficiencies. Promoting women's participation in the paid labour market as a central route for women to obtain citizenship status requires women to conform to a citizenship framework which is based upon men's attributes, abilities and interactions with the paid labour market (Lister, 2003; Fraser, 1998; Pateman, 1989). This approach therefore has the potential to devalue care (Fraser, 1998) and it may not be possible for women to obtain full citizenship status: if they pursue this route, women will only obtain citizenship status as "lesser men" (Pateman, 1989, p.197). This is in large part due to women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and the impossibility of fully commodifying care. For historical and biological reasons, women are likely to continue to have a stronger connection to unpaid care than men (Fraser, 1994). Therefore, women will always be disadvantaged in the paid labour market as all of women's responsibility for unpaid

care cannot be transferred to formal childcare provision. For example, many parental responsibilities such as attending to family emergencies including child injury and illness cannot be catered for by formal childcare provision (Fraser, 1998). The affective dimension of unpaid care also puts limits on the extent to which it can be commodified. Unpaid care is not merely a task: it also entails relationships, morals and emotions (see Chapter 1.3.3). Many mothers define 'being there' as an integral part of care (Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002), indicating that unpaid care is also about emotional and practical availability. Thus while formal care plays an important role in supplementing unpaid care, it can never fully substitute for it (Lynch and Walsh, 2009; Lewis and Giullari, 2005). The gendered cultural validation system which regards the types of paid work women typically engage in as inferior also limits the extent to which women can obtain citizenship status through paid work as this economic system generates gendered economic marginalization and deprivation (Fraser, 1998). There have also been problematic outcomes in the commodification of care. While the commodification of care has enabled some women to participate more fully in the paid labour market, this has been at the expense of the labour market position of other groups of women (Bergman et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2008). Increasing women's employment creates a demand for formal childcare provision (MacLeavy, 2007). However, formal childcare work, primarily carried out by women, is often low-paid, low status, precarious work with limited prospects for career progression (Bergman et al., 2012; MacLeavy, 2007). Therefore, as Bergman et al. explain,

many middle-class women, who are themselves negatively affected by the prevailing gender order, participate in the reproduction of these very same structures. By reducing their individual burden they shift the problem elsewhere, to other groups (2012, p.112).

These other groups of women tend to be from working-class and migrant backgrounds (Cain, 2016; Bergman et al., 2012; McDowell, 2008). This illustrates that an additional problem with pursuing women's citizenship status through participation in the paid labour market is that some women may find citizenship status harder to obtain than others due to intersecting structural inequalities in the paid labour market (see Section 2.2.1).

Policies seeking to elevate the value of care, if implemented independently of measures to improve labour market equality and redistribute care, may also be problematic. For example, while caregiver allowances can elevate the intrinsic value of care and accommodate women's activities in citizenship frameworks rather than insist women conform to men's interactions with the paid labour market, they also have the potential to disadvantage women. A first concern is that providing caregiver allowances entrenches women in traditional gender roles thereby reinforcing women's roles as unpaid carers and men's roles as earners in the paid labour market (Williams, 2004; Cass, 1994). This could impede a more even distribution of caring responsibilities and reduce women's capacity for agency regarding engagement in paid employment and unpaid care. Low-income mothers in precarious jobs may particularly become entrenched in traditional gender roles due to the attractiveness of caregiver allowances compared to their paid employment opportunities (Bergman et al., 2012). The provision of caregiver allowances may also have negative implications for women's long-term economic position (Williams, 2004; Lister, 2003). Withdrawal from the paid labour market to look after children can result in decreased earnings over the life course (Orloff, 1993) and low pensions in retirement (MacLeavy, 2011). Time away from the paid market can also make re-entering paid work at a later stage difficult as a result of loss of knowledge of the contemporary paid labour market, human capital and confidence (Grant, 2009). Therefore, pursuing citizenship status solely through policies such as caregiver allowances that aim to elevate unpaid care may further embed both women's disproportionate responsibility for care and their weaker labour market position.

Other means of engendering citizenship have been proposed but these also have both advantages and disadvantages. For example, in order to both recognise the importance of unpaid care to citizenship status and promote women's labour market position, authors such as Williams (2012), Lister (2003), Cass (1994), Fraser (1994) and Orloff (1993) have argued for the redistribution of care from women to men thereby addressing the gendered division of labour. This is very advantageous in that it would free women to participate on a more equal basis with men in the paid labour market while ensuring that caring responsibilities are attended to, and would promote a recognition of interdependency. This strategy also has the potential to reduce androcentrism and women's marginalisation, equalise leisure time and

promote more equality of respect (Fraser, 1994). However, such a position continues the devaluation of unpaid care by implying that women must participate in the paid labour market in order to achieve citizenship status and also implies that men's engagement in unpaid care is necessary for it to be valued and recognised. Also, as Lister (2000) and Orloff (2009) acknowledge, there may also be practical limitations with this approach. Male participation in unpaid care may not be appropriate or possible (for example, in the case of abusive relationships). Additionally, the introduction of recent policies which aim to encourage a more even distribution of unpaid care such as Shared Parental Leave¹ has had a low take-up by fathers in the UK due to a variety of reasons including fathers' reluctance to interrupt their careers (Birkett and Forbes, 2019). Consequently, while this solution may be beneficial for many mothers, other mothers may not see any improvement in their citizenship status as it leaves women dependent on men engaging more fully in unpaid care, which may be neither possible nor desirable. The next subsection discusses a more comprehensive means of creating a more gender inclusive citizenship framework.

2.2.3 A potential way forward

The varying approaches discussed above for advancing women's citizenship status all contain both advantages and limitations. While the tensions in engendering citizenship and women's differing and fluid identities render a solution that is free from disadvantages unobtainable, a promising way forward is to support both women's participation in the paid labour market and their roles as unpaid carers (Lister, 2003; Cass, 1994). The dichotomy between promoting women's participation in the paid labour market and valuing their unpaid care must be dismantled: both are valid expressions of citizenship (Lister, 2003). By improving women's position in the paid labour market and legitimising women's unpaid caring roles, women's citizenship status can be promoted rather than hindered (Lister, 2003). This approach does not position women as either solely 'workers' or 'carers' and therefore

¹ Shared Parental Leave was introduced in the UK in 2015. Under this policy, an eligible mother can share up to fifty weeks of parental leave with her partner within the first year of their child's birth.

accommodates both the life course and women's diversity. The policy ramifications of this approach involve designing and implementing a wide range of measures aimed at supporting unpaid caring roles through the provision of time and financial resources, combating gender inequalities in the paid labour market and redistributing unpaid care to men and the state where possible (Pascall, 2012; Lister, 2003; Cass, 1994).

Enlarging women's agency is also key to creating a more gender inclusive concept of citizenship. As explained in Chapter 1.3.4, agency refers to the ability to determine one's own daily life and the capacity for free choice, yet is exercised within a social context and is influenced by social norms, interpersonal relationships, environments and relations of power. Therefore, the ability to exercise choice is always constrained to some extent. Agency is key to citizenship and is particularly important to women's citizenship (Lister, 2003). It is crucial for empowering women and for ensuring women are not assumed to be passive dependents who fulfil ascribed social roles (McNay, 2016; Nussbaum, 2003). However, historically women have been denied agency and it has been assumed that women are incapable of acting autonomously (McNay, 2016). Regarding unpaid care, while women have been assumed to be natural carers and ascribed the duty of care, Marshall's influential concept of citizenship did not include the right to give and receive unpaid care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997). This has the potential to limit women's options for carrying out unpaid care. As Knijn and Kremer explain, "Only when both the right to give and the right to receive care are assured can citizens (caregivers as well as care receivers) have a real choice about how they want to integrate care in their lives" (1997, p.333). In addition, due to women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, women are more limited than men in their ability to make unconstrained choices in regard to participation in the paid labour market (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). Thus, women are restricted by differing factors in their agency regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work.

These constraints have the potential to devalue unpaid care through failing to guarantee the right to care and to limit women's participation in the paid labour market, and are incompatible with a citizenship framework that considers both paid work and unpaid care as valid citizenship contributions. Therefore, these constraints

need to be addressed and women's agency needs to be enlarged in part by providing the material and social conditions that enable women to enact agency (Gould, 1983). Additionally, policy needs to be supportive rather than prescriptive which is particularly important given the diversity of families (Duncan and Smith, 2002). Therefore, policies are needed that not only promote the valuing of unpaid care and women's position in the paid labour market but that also enable women (and men) to make genuine choices regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work (Lewis and Giullari, 2005).

In summary, women have a marginalised position in dominant citizenship frameworks as conceptions of citizenship are based around masculine activities, attributes and interactions with the paid labour market. However, engendering citizenship has encountered difficulty. The two main routes to pursuing women's citizenship status both contain significant advantages and disadvantages for women. These tensions are not easily overcome but a promising way forward is to implement a wide range of policies designed to promote the value of unpaid care and women's equitable participation in paid work, and enable women to exercise agency regarding their engagement in unpaid care and paid work. This approach does not negate all of the tensions involved in women's citizenship dilemmas and there is a much broader context in which gendered cultures and practices and other structural intersecting inequalities need to be addressed. However, this approach would give women different options for pursuing citizenship status (through paid work, unpaid care or a combination of the two) and therefore accommodate both the life course and the diversity of women given their different orientations to unpaid care and paid work. It would also re-balance citizenship frameworks so that they are also based upon the unpaid caring activities disproportionately carried out by women. Additionally, through addressing gender inequalities in the paid labour market and providing adequate financial provision for those who engage in unpaid care, this approach would help ensure women's economic independence from men.

2.3 Welfare conditionality

This section reviews the literature and research concerning welfare conditionality with reference to women's citizenship. Section 2.3.1 outlines the history of this policy measure in the UK. Section 2.3.2 presents New Right theories of the welfare dependent 'underclass' and the paternalist and contractualist justifications for conditionality. While there are multiple ideological justifications for the implementation of conditionality, paternalism and contractualism have been the most commonly used justifications in recent UK conditionality policies (Whitworth and Griggs, 2013) and are particularly evident in the government literature concerning Universal Credit (for example, DWP, 2015e, 2013). Section 2.3.3 discusses the objections to conditionality and reviews the research to date on the efficacy and ethicality of conditionality.

2.3.1 History of conditionality in the UK

In the UK, access to employment benefits has always been conditional on involuntary employment, being available for paid work, actively seeking paid work and accepting job offers (Fletcher and Wright, 2018; Dwyer, 2016; Watts et al., 2014; Griggs and Evans, 2010; Trickey and Walker, 2001). However, the Conservative governments of 1979-1997 intensified conditionality and expanded it to include specific paid work-related behavioural requirements (Dwyer, 2016; Watts et al., 2014; Trickey and Walker, 2001). Two key changes were made to the benefits system. The first was the introduction of the Restart programme in 1986, wherein unemployed claimants had to attend a Jobcentre appointment after six months of receiving benefits to demonstrate that they were actively seeking work. During these interviews, 'back to work' plans were completed and a job-seeking questionnaire was administered aiming to ascertain whether or not claimants were accepting 'reasonable' job offers (Freedland and King, 2003). Non-attendance at the interviews could result in a sanction (Dwyer and Ellison, 2009a). The second key change was the introduction of JSA in 1996, which is viewed as a watershed moment in the history of the UK benefits system (Fletcher and Wright, 2018; Watts et al., 2014; Freedland and King, 2003). Under this policy, claimants had to attend fortnightly interviews at the Jobcentre and sign a 'Jobseeker's Agreement'. This

stipulated their availability for paid work and the specific job search activities they were required to carry out under threat of sanction (Griggs, Hammond and Walker, 2014; Trickey and Walker, 2001).

The Conservative governments' changes to the benefits system laid the foundation for the reforms of the New Labour government (1997-2010) (Fletcher and Wright, 2018; Griggs, Hammond and Walker, 2014; Trickey and Walker, 2001).

Conditionality was central to these reforms (Dwyer, 2016) and was significantly intensified and expanded by the introduction of a series of New Deals (Dwyer and Ellison, 2009a). Initially, the New Deal for Young People was implemented which mandated participation in one of four paid work and training options, with sanctions ranging between two and twenty-six weeks for failure to participate (Griggs, Hammond and Walker, 2014; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009a). Other New Deals with varying requirements and degrees of compulsion were also implemented, resulting in the extension of conditionality to groups previously exempt from work-related expectations such as lone parents, disabled people and partners of unemployed claimants (Griggs, Hammond and Walker, 2014; Trickey and Walker, 2001). The policies of the subsequent Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government (2010-2015) and Conservative governments (2015, 2017 and 2019) have further intensified the approach to conditionality adopted by New Labour (Dwyer, 2016) as evidenced in the introduction of Universal Credit, which entails the most extensive and intensive application of conditionality to date (Wright and Dwyer, 2020; Dwyer and Wright, 2014).

The use of conditionality is widely debated within the academic literature. In addition to disputes concerning the underpinning assumptions, efficacy and ethicality of conditionality, Marshall's (1950) highly influential discussion of social citizenship is integral to conditionality debates. While some feminists have criticised Marshall for his lack of attention to gender, they have also commended him for establishing the legitimacy of social rights alongside political and civic rights (for example, Lister, 2003). This affirmation of social rights significantly changed citizenship status in the UK (Dwyer, 2004). However, within the conditionality literature, there are differing interpretations of Marshall's definition of social rights and opposing views on whether they should be upheld. The next subsection begins with theories from the New

Right, which challenge social rights, and then describes the paternalist and contractualist justifications for conditionality.

2.3.2 Justifications for conditionality

The New Right represents a diverse group of thinkers who in general oppose both the welfare state and universal social rights (Dwyer, 2000). Two New Right thinkers particularly influential on the British governments of the past four decades are Murray and Mead, Americans who have both applied their theories to British society (for example, Murray, 2001, 1994b, 1990; Mead, 1997b, 1991). The works of Murray and Mead have been instrumental in permeating perceptions of the existence of a welfare dependent 'underclass' in the UK (Garrett, 2015; Deacon, 2000; Stepney, Lynch and Jordan, 1999; Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992), which is a primary assumption underpinning the implementation of conditionality. While Murray and Mead both consider that the welfare state causes the development of a welfare dependent 'underclass', they offer different solutions in respect of the welfare state (Dwyer, 2000).

Murray (2001, 1999, 1994a, 1994b, 1990) claims there are two types of poor people: those who are on a low income and trying to do their best in difficult circumstances and those who engage in destructive behaviour and perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage. The latter are deemed to belong to an 'underclass' of people who would rather live off benefits than undertake paid work. He contends members of the 'underclass' have different values from the rest of society and that there has been a negative change in attitudes and behaviour towards paid work. He perceives these failings in values and behaviour, rather than lack of available jobs, are the cause of unemployment and poverty. Murray places great importance on the value of paid work, considering it to be "at the centre of life" (1990, p.22). He argues it benefits individuals both economically and personally, and contends that unemployment leads to a breakdown of communities and destructive behaviour. There is a further gendered dimension to Murray's arguments: he focuses on lone motherhood as he thinks that this results in increasing numbers of young men who are more likely to commit crime and who have not been socialised into paid work norms due to a lack of a male role model. While acknowledging that "It is all horribly

sexist, I know" (Murray, 1994b, p.32), Murray argues that women should face economic penalties on having children alone so that the welfare state does not continue to facilitate lone motherhood. Regarding the welfare state in general, Murray contends that welfare programmes have been ineffective and have hindered rather than helped poor people. He blames governments for "wrong-headed policies that seduce people into behaving in ways that seem sensible in the short term but are disastrous in the long term" (1990, p.71). He thus thinks that welfare programmes increase dependency and result in growth of the 'underclass'. His proposed solution to this is to abolish public welfare for working-age people except short-term unemployment insurance. In place of national support, he advocates a network of local services to meet the needs of those who are particularly vulnerable.

Similarly to Murray, Mead (2005, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1991, 1986) contends that an 'underclass' has emerged consisting of those on a low income with severe behavioural problems. He conceives that the poverty of this 'underclass' stems from behaviour rather than structural barriers and inequalities. He also contends that poor people want to undertake paid work, but that they lack competency and are demoralised, describing them as "inert" and claiming "they do so little to help themselves" (1991, p.10). Mead considers that failure to take the paid work opportunities available results in long-term unemployment and welfare dependency, exacerbated by the state which has historically provided benefits without requiring paid work and other socially desirable behaviour in return. Consequently, he argues against the Marshallian case for universal rights: he perceives that poor people have failings in citizenship behaviour and as such, this negates their right to state support. He explains, "If the dependent poor become better citizens, especially by working, then the Marshallian case for aiding them is restored" (1991, pp.220–221).

Therefore, in line with the civic republican approach to citizenship (see Chapter 1.3.1), Mead emphasises citizenship obligations over social rights (Lister, 2003) and believes that poor people have to fulfil particular societal obligations before they can be granted social rights. As the above quote shows, paid work is central to his conception of citizenship obligations. Mead's arguments also have a further gendered dimension. He does not think unpaid care carried out by low-income single mothers constitutes a valid societal contribution. Like Murray, he considers single mothers in receipt of social security benefits to be deficient in raising children.

He therefore argues that they should not be supported by the state in their caregiving work and instead should be expected to undertake paid work.

Mead's solution to the problems of the welfare state is to apply conditionality and he is a prominent advocate of the paternalist justification for conditionality. According to Mead (1997c), paternalism entails directing claimants through instituting behavioural requirements and closely supervising claimants' attempts to fulfil these. Mead considers the distinctive aspect of paternalism is that it is based on being in the best interests of poor people. Perceived benefits of conditionality include improved functioning of poor people, increased employment, less dependency and integration of poor people into society. Mead contends that applying conditionality results in restored citizenship and legitimises poor people's right to state support. He claims those subject to paternalism adhere to the values being imposed, and thus conditionality closes the gap between intentions and behaviour. He also argues that paternalism does not produce net harm, and that instead, "most likely it reduces overall suffering by improving lifestyles" (1997c, p.26). While the 'underclass' theories of both Murray and Mead have been used by politicians to make the case for conditionality, it is Mead's paternalistic solution to the problems of the welfare state that has been incorporated into UK policy.

In addition to the paternalist justification for conditionality, UK governments have also drawn upon a number of other ideological positions and have particularly used the contractualist justification to support the implementation of conditionality (Patrick, 2016; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Deacon, 2004). White (2007; 2004, 2003, 2000, 1999), a prominent UK proponent of the contractualist justification for conditionality explains this position as follows:

Access to welfare benefits is one side of the contract between the citizen and community which has as its reverse side various responsibilities that the individual citizen is obliged to meet: as a condition of eligibility for welfare benefits, the state may legitimately enforce these responsibilities, which centrally include the responsibility to work (2000, p.507).

Under this justification, rights are bestowed on citizens first and the fulfilment of responsibilities is expected in return, and therefore it is rooted in the liberal approach to citizenship (see Chapter 1.3.1). White defends contractualism on the basis of a principle of reciprocity. He contends that under this principle, those who receive from the social product have a corresponding obligation to make a productive contribution. White explains that a principle of reciprocity “suggests that it is legitimate to connect economic entitlements with the performance of productive obligations, to balance these rights with responsibilities” (1999, p.178). White also contends that contractualism is compatible with Marshall’s concept of social citizenship. He believes there is a difference between unconditional access to financial resources and reasonable access to financial resources. He advocates for the latter definition of social rights and deems this to be compatible with contractualism. To support his argument, he contends that Marshall’s definition of social rights is vague and can accommodate his understanding of social rights. White also argues Marshall affirmed the obligations of social citizenship as well as rights and that to Marshall, paid work was of prime importance. Regarding gender, White does consider unpaid care to be a valid citizenship contribution. However, to address concerns raised by Mead about the potential lack of quality of such care, he argues parents and carers need to demonstrate their accountability for their unpaid care in return for financial support.

In sum, the implementation of conditionality in the UK has been underpinned by belief in an ‘underclass’ of welfare dependents who are not sufficiently motivated to undertake paid work and prefer to receive their income from social security benefits, and who pass on this perceived culture of worklessness to subsequent generations (Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014). Regarding Universal Credit specifically, government rhetoric has followed the underclass discourse of 1980s conservative thought (Kowalewska, 2015). This has been used to justify both the introduction of Universal Credit and the expansion of conditionality (DWP, 2015c, 2014a, 2010b, 2010c). The implementation of conditionality in the UK is also underpinned by other assumptions evident in New Right thought such as the primacy of paid work as the central citizenship obligation, and this is also prevalent in the Universal Credit literature (DWP, 2010a, 2010c). Given UK governments have considered that the problems of poverty and unemployment are deemed to be caused by the behaviour

of benefits recipients and paid work is "the best form of welfare" (DWP, 2008, p.25), they have implemented conditionality, an essentially behaviouristic policy (Etherington and Daguerre, 2015; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013) to get claimants into paid work. As Deacon explains, "The primary purpose of such welfare conditionality is not to determine entitlement or to establish need, but to change behaviour" (2004, p.912). This emphasis on behaviour change is apparent in the Universal Credit 'Theory of Change' (see Chapter 3.2.2). Regarding the ideological justifications for conditionality, within the Universal Credit literature, the contractualist justification is particularly evident; for example, the DWP has explained that:

The conditionality regime will recast the relationship between the citizen and the State from one centred on "entitlement" to one centred on a contractual concept that provides a range of support in return for claimant's meeting an explicit set of responsibilities, with a sanctions regime to encourage compliance (2013, p.2).

The paternalist justification for conditionality is also evident in the Universal Credit literature (cf. Work and Pensions Committee, 2015). For example, the extension of conditionality to main carers of children aged three and four (see Chapter 3.3.2) was justified on the basis of being in the best interests of claimants' children: "There will be a longer term improvement in children's wellbeing and life chances as fewer will grow up in workless households" (DWP, 2015e, p.1). However, there are considerable objections to these justifications for conditionality and the assumptions that underpin its implementation as discussed next.

2.3.3 Objections to conditionality

A key objection to conditionality is that it erodes the social rights Marshall extolled (Dwyer, 2016, 2004; King, 1999). Marshall defined social rights as "the whole range 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 life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in society" (1950, p.8). As this shows, Marshall viewed that social citizenship entails at the very least the right to basic financial provision. Contrary to White's arguments, Marshall's consideration of responsibilities was brief:

instead his emphasis was on rights, which he viewed as universal and largely unconditional (Dwyer, 2016, 2004, 2000; Etherington and Daguerre, 2015). However, through implementing conditionality, successive governments have reformulated rights and responsibilities (Reeves et al. 2017; Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Paz-Fuchs, 2008). Responsibilities have been emphasised over rights (Dwyer, 2016; Lister, 2011a, King, 1999), with undertaking paid work as the predominant responsibility (Dwyer, 2016; Griggs, Hammond and Walker, 2014; Wright, 2011), and eligibility to access social rights is now contingent on paid work-related behaviour rather than entitlement and need (Dwyer, 2004). Those opposed to conditionality do not deny the responsibilities people have to each other and the state (Dwyer, 2004; Goodin, 2002); however, making rights conditional on responsibilities is contested as this fundamentally undermines the status of social rights (Dwyer, 2016, 2004; Paz-Fuchs, 2008; Dean, 2001; King, 1999). People can no longer be guaranteed access to the resources necessary to meet basic needs if this can be denied on the basis of state-stipulated behaviour. Therefore, the implementation of conditionality has ultimately resulted in a reconfiguration of social citizenship (Dwyer, 2016; Wright, 2011; Paz-Fuchs, 2008; King, 1999). The intensification and expansion of conditionality under Universal Credit continues this challenge to Marshallian social citizenship. As Dwyer and Wright explain, “The type and scale of the conditionality changes within Universal Credit...represent a fundamental change to the principles on which the British welfare state was founded” (2014, p.33).

The challenge to social citizenship posed by the implementation of conditionality is particularly problematic given that the reduction of social rights and increase in responsibilities has mainly affected poor people (Lister, 2011a; Dwyer, 2004, 1998). Consequently, the poorest and most vulnerable members of society are most likely to be negatively impacted by the implementation of conditionality (Grover, 2012; Dwyer, 2004). This is supported by the evidence on conditionality. For example, Reeves and Loopstra found certain vulnerable groups are particularly affected by conditionality, and conclude:

Conditionality appears to disadvantage those with ill health, physical limitations, or uncertain family commitments. These penalties may exclude these individuals from some of the entitlements of social citizenship: not because they are unwilling but because they are, in many cases, unable to live up to these new norms of productive and active citizenship (2017, p.335).

Thus the erosion of status based social entitlements and the redefinition of citizenship under the implementation and intensification of conditionality has disproportionate and profoundly negative consequences on the poorest and most disadvantaged members of society.

The individual justifications for conditionality are also contested. Paternalism is based on the assumption that governments know what is best for benefits recipients. This implies a superiority on the part of governments to those targeted for behaviour change interventions (Bielefeld, 2014). It also enables policy makers to impose values on to people who may not share them (Goodin, 2001), such as the mothers in British society who consider their primary responsibility to be caring for their children rather than undertaking paid work (Barlow, Duncan and James, 2002). A further objection to paternalism is that conditionality is only applied to poor people (Standing, 2011). While the responsibilities of poor people, particularly to undertake paid work, have been increased, the social behaviour and responsibilities of rich people have been largely unconsidered (Pykett, 2014, Patrick, 2012b, Lister, 2011a). The justification of conditionality on the grounds that it compels people into paid work, which is good for them, falters on the grounds that such compulsion is not applied to rich people who are not in paid employment (Goodin, 2001). Additionally, while Mead (1997c) views the infantilising of benefit recipients under paternalism as unproblematic, it contradicts a key aim of conditionality by eroding, rather than increasing, personal responsibility (Standing, 2011).

The contractualist justification for conditionality is also contested. Key objections concern the power imbalance between the state and benefits recipients. At the macro-level, governments can unilaterally change the terms of the 'contract' (for example, by increasing claimants' responsibilities or decreasing their rights) without the agreement of benefits recipients (Grover, 2012; Goodin, 2001). At the

micro-level, the 'contract' between the state and welfare recipient (for example, the Claimant Commitment of Universal Credit) cannot be properly described as such: recipients sign these agreements under duress rather than by choice, as they are required to in order to receive benefit payments (Standing, 2011; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b; Goodin, 2001). Recent research demonstrates work-related commitments within the UK conditionality regime are often coercive and imposed, rather than mutually agreed (Wright et al., 2016; Fawcett Society, 2015). This could be particularly problematic for women—who have historically been subject to control within households—as it may result in them being subject to a domineering public patriarchy (see Section 2.2.2). Additionally, the current emphasis on contractualism is objectionable given that the state is requiring more of benefits recipients while failing to fulfil its responsibilities to them, as evidenced by increases in social inequality, decreases in social mobility and the inadequacy of social security benefits (McKeever and Walsh, 2020; Grover, 2012). This criticism may be particularly apt to the introduction of Universal Credit, which has increased claimants' responsibilities, for example, by requiring extensive hours of mandatory job search, while decreasing levels of benefit payments for many recipients and especially women (see Chapters 1.2 and 3.3).

The assumptions underlying conditionality such as the primacy of paid work, the existence of cultural welfare dependency and the expectation people will respond to sanctions in an economically rational manner are also contested. The dominance of paid work in current citizenship frameworks is objectionable in that undertaking paid work does not necessarily result in the purported benefits of paid work, such as poverty alleviation and improvements to physical and mental health. Recent research into exclusionary employment found that:

one in six adults in work is poor in spite of high levels of support for some groups through tax credits; one in six adults is in poor quality work which is unfulfilling in itself and which is likely to be harmful to health and well-being; and one in ten adults appears to be highly insecure, having experienced at least 6 months unemployment in the previous five years (Bailey, 2016, p.98).

Other research also shows there is a high prevalence of in-work poverty in the UK (Brewer, Finch and Tomlinson, 2017; Cribb et al., 2017), partly due to the rise in low-paid, insecure work that has few employment rights, such as zero-hour contracts and agency work (Ball et al., 2017). Rather than alleviate poverty, this type of work keeps people in a low-pay, no-pay cycle which is difficult to escape and only temporarily lifts people just above official poverty thresholds (Thompson, 2015; Shildrick et al., 2010). Therefore, while paid work is an important route out of poverty, it is not a guaranteed one (Newman, 2011), particularly if job security, low pay and lack of progression are not addressed (Goulden, 2010). This is particularly acute for women given their propensity to enter precarious jobs and struggle to progress in paid work (see Section 2.2.1).

A second objection to the centrality of paid work within conditionality policies is that it devalues other socially valid and necessary contributions (Deeming, 2015; Friedli and Stearn, 2015; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b; Deacon and Patrick, 2011). The expectation that nearly everyone should be in paid work implies that those who are engaged in other essential societal activity, such as unpaid care, are not contributing to society (Barker and Lambie, 2009). Rather than recognise unpaid care as a valid and necessary social contribution in line with a more gender inclusive concept of citizenship, unpaid care is viewed within conditionality policies as a barrier to paid work (Davies, 2015; Deacon and Patrick, 2011). The potential for conditionality policies to devalue unpaid care is particularly problematic given the value many mothers place on unpaid care. Unpaid care is highly valued by those who carry it out, to the extent that some carry it out at high personal cost (Bowlby et al., 2010; Lynch and Lyons, 2009a). Some research suggests that working class women particularly value their roles and identities as unpaid carers (for example, Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Gillies, 2007; Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Therefore, there is a commitment to unpaid care which is not recognised within welfare-to-work policies aimed at increasing mothers' participation in the paid labour market (McDowell, 2005).

The prevailing conception of welfare dependency is also disputed. A primary issue is that this term is only applied to benefit recipients. As Titmuss (1963) pointed out several decades ago, accusations of idleness are only applied in relation to social

welfare which distorts the fact that everyone is dependent on welfare in one form or another. More recently, Spicker (2002) has argued that dependency arguments are never made in relation to services like health and education that are almost universally used. Similarly, the term 'welfare dependency' is used in reference to receipt of certain benefits, particularly out-of-work benefits, whereas reliance on other provisions within the social security system is not considered as dependency (Patrick, 2012b; Dwyer, 2004). Grover and Stewart explain that under New Labour, "using subsidized nursery places for one's children, is not part of benefit dependency, whereas looking after one's own children at home on benefit income is dependency" (2000, p.248). Therefore, while everyone is dependent on welfare, only certain benefit recipients receive moral censure (Patrick, 2012). By merging six in-work and out-of-work benefits into one benefit and extending work-related requirements to previously unaffected groups including those in low-paid work (see Chapter 3.2), the introduction of Universal Credit increases the number of claimants subject to stigma and exclusion (Wright and Dwyer, 2020).

Assumptions of the prevalence of a welfare dependent 'underclass' who have a preference for benefit receipt and a lack of a work ethic are not supported by the evidence. Instead, various studies have found that benefits recipients dislike receiving benefits and want to undertake paid work (Wright, 2016; Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014; Patrick, 2014; Shildrick et al., 2010). Research has also found people maintain a commitment to, and determination to find, paid work despite challenging labour market conditions and numerous employment setbacks (Patrick, 2014; Shildrick et al., 2010; Crisp, Batty and Cole, 2009) and that instances of families with two generations who have never worked are very rare (Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014). In addition, research shows many in receipt of benefits undertake significant amounts of other forms of social contribution such as unpaid care and volunteering (Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong, 2014; Patrick, 2014). As MacDonald, Shildrick and Furlong note, this finding "points to the irony of labelling families like these as 'workless households'" (2014, p.209).

A major criticism of the concept of a welfare dependent 'underclass' is that by focusing on the behaviour and attitudes of poor people, attention is diverted from the wider structural causes of unemployment and poverty in the UK (Friedli and Stearn,

2015; Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Lister, 1996; Walker, 1996). This is evident in the application of conditionality, a supply-side policy which fails to recognise and address demand-side problems and other barriers to paid employment (Deeming, 2015; Grover, 2012; Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Barker and Lambie, 2009; Trickey and Walker, 2001). These include problems with the paid labour market such as the prevalence of insecure jobs, low levels of pay, the wide gender pay gap and geographical differences in employment opportunities. Research evidence supports the notion that external barriers, rather than individual deficiency, result in unemployment. For example, research investigating conditionality and lone parents has found that many lone parents want to undertake paid work but are impeded by lack of qualifications, experience, confidence, jobs that are compatible with unpaid caring responsibilities, transport and suitable, affordable childcare (Johnsen, 2016; Graham and McQuaid, 2014). Thus governments overestimate the amount of control benefit recipients have over their employment prospects (Wright, 2016).

The highly gendered aspects of the 'underclass' theory and the narrow definition of 'welfare dependency' are also contested. Blaming lone mothers for raising delinquent, 'welfare dependent' children and therefore for perpetuating the 'underclass' has been criticised for unfairly castigating lone mothers based on scant evidence (Mann and Roseneil, 1994) and for attributing lone parenthood as the cause of major societal change rather than the result (Slipman, 1996). Research contemporaneous with the time of Murray and Mead's work on the 'underclass' in the UK showed that lone parents did not have different values from the rest of society but instead held mainstream values regarding paid work (Dean and Taylor-Gooby, 1992). Additionally, Barlow et al. (2002) argue that research shows that lone mothers who choose not to take up paid work do so because they consider this the morally right choice as a mother rather than because they reject self-reliance and social responsibility. This links to a problematic contradiction in Murray's writing: mothers in receipt of social security benefits are accused of being irresponsible for looking after their children full-time whereas wealthier mothers who can stay at home to look after their children due to their husband's wages are valorised (Goodin, 1998). This position therefore ignores the problems of women's economic dependence on men and fails to recognise interdependency and the unpaid welfare

work low-income women carry out (Fraser and Gordon, 1994), contrary to a more gender inclusive citizenship framework.

The assumptions regarding how people will respond to sanctions are also questionable. The government perceives that people act in an economically rational manner, making individualised decisions based on the anticipated economic costs and benefits to themselves, and therefore will alter their behaviour in response to the threat of sanction. However, behavioural economics demonstrates that instead of making decisions based on rational factors, people often make decisions based on what they have always done and what others around them do (Darnton, 2008; Prendergast et al., 2008; Dawney and Shah, 2005). From a gender perspective Barlow et al. (2002) argue that in introducing the New Deals for Lone Parents, New Labour made a 'rationality mistake' in assuming that lone parents would act in an economically rational manner in response to conditionality. These authors consider that as lone parents make decisions about paid work primarily on the basis of their understanding of what it means to be a 'good mother' (see Section 2.2.2), conditionality may be ineffective. Similarly, research conducted by NatCen for the DWP investigating how Universal Credit affects changes in labour market behaviour suggests that conditionality may not be able to override preferences for unpaid care and aversion to formal childcare (DWP, 2017b). Government assumptions regarding decision making also ignore the interdependency of human life: decisions are rarely made in isolation but instead people take into account the needs and interests of those closest to them (see Chapter 1.3). As Wright argues, the government misjudges agency by assuming it is "strictly individual, unitary, rational or purposive" rather than "contextual, emergent, contingent, relational and dynamic" (2012, p.324), and therefore oversimplifies how people will respond to the threat of sanction.

Evidence supporting the view that conditionality changes behaviour in an effective and meaningful way is limited. Findings from the Welfare Conditionality Project (Dwyer, 2018a), a five year qualitative longitudinal study investigating sanctions, support and behaviour change, found very little evidence of conditionality changing people's behaviour regarding preparing for and obtaining paid work. This study also shows that behaviour change that does occur can be ineffective and compliance-based. Further evidence of compliance-based changes in behaviour includes

research conducted by NatCen for the DWP which found that while some Universal Credit claimants spent more time job searching and applied for more jobs, others lengthened job search with unproductive activity and produced lower quality job applications (DWP, 2017b). In particular, parents who wished to spend more time with their children exhibited compliance-based behaviour. In reference to lone parents, the SSAC (Social Security Advisory Committee) concludes, “there is a difference, it seems, between encouraging compliance, such as attending a WFI [work focused interview], and increasing motivation for and engagement with any particular programme” (2012, p.13).

Perhaps owing to the contested underlying assumptions of conditionality, the evidence provides little support for the notion that conditionality is effective in sustainably improving employment rates and incomes. Findings from the Welfare Conditionality Project (Dwyer, 2018a) along with other studies investigating the impact of conditionality on specific groups including lone parents (Goodwin, 2008) and disabled people (Reeves, 2017) have found that conditionality is of little efficacy in improving moves into employment. Two reviews of the international evidence (National Audit Office, 2016; Griggs and Evans, 2010) conclude that benefits sanctions increase both exits from benefits and employment rates; however, there are negative impacts on earnings over time and the effects on employment can be short lived. Recent evidence from the UK (Loopstra et al., 2015) found that while sanctions increase exits from unemployment benefits, only twenty percent of claimants move into paid work while the other eighty percent move into destinations unrelated to paid work. There is also evidence which shows that sanction-backed conditionality results in lower earnings over time and less secure employment, and that claimants accept jobs at a lower occupational level (Arni, Lalive and van Ours, 2013; van den Berg and Vikström, 2014). In addition, for the minority that do move into paid work, it is not always clear as to whether this is due to the imposition of sanctions or the support provided (Griggs and Bennett, 2009; Watts et al., 2014). However, research suggests that personalised support is more effective than sanctions in moving people into paid work (Dwyer, 2018a; Weston, 2012).

Additionally, there is evidence demonstrating that sanctions regimes can be counterproductive. Research suggests that sanctioning disabled people pushes

them further away from the paid labour market (Reeves, 2017) and that the threat of sanction makes some less likely to engage with support due to perceptions that the policy is unfair (Weston, 2012). The imposition of mandatory work-related requirements can render conditionality counterproductive when it takes time and effort away from more effective methods of job search (Dwyer, 2018a). Conditionality can also undermine confidence essential for job search (Wright et al., 2016). There is also evidence that suggests that the intensive job search requirements under Universal Credit are counterproductive: when compared with JSA claimants, Universal Credit claimants experienced a considerably greater loss of confidence that they would find a job within the next three months (DWP, 2015d).

In addition to showing the limited efficacy of conditionality, the current evidence also points to the ethical issues of this policy measure. Studies investigating conditionality have found that sanctions have very detrimental financial impacts such as inability to pay for basic provisions including food, lighting and heating, and lead to the accumulation of debt, utility bill arrears and rent arrears, in some cases resulting in eviction threats (Dwyer, 2018a; Patrick, 2017; Goodwin, 2008). Some resort to 'survival crime' such as shoplifting for food (Dwyer, 2018a; Patrick, 2017). Research has also shown there is an association between sanctions and foodbank use (Loopstra and Reeves, 2015). These findings suggest conditionality results in increased, rather than decreased poverty, contrary to government claims (Work and Pensions Committee, 2015; DWP, 2011b). Studies show that conditionality can also be detrimental to physical health and result in increased stress and anxiety (Williams, 2020; Dwyer, 2018a; Patrick, 2011; Goodwin, 2008). This applies not just to those who have experienced a sanction, but also to those who are under the threat of sanction (Wright, Fletcher and Stewart, 2020; Dwyer, 2018a).

In sum, the assumptions and justifications for implementing conditionality have been contested and some of the objections have a gendered dimension. The contractualist justification ignores power imbalances, which are particularly pertinent to women given the patriarchal relationships they often experience with both men and the state. The paternalist justification may result in policy makers imposing values (particularly concerning engagement in paid work and unpaid care) on mothers that they do not share. The emphasis placed on paid work within

conditionality policies has been criticised for devaluing other types of social contribution including unpaid care (Deeming, 2015; Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b) and for failing to recognise that many people, especially women, do not obtain the rewards of paid work due to the prevalence of precarious and low paid jobs in the UK (Fawcett Society, 2015). The theory of the 'underclass' and the government's narrow definition of welfare dependency fails to recognise interdependency (such as the unpaid welfare work women carry out) and blames lone mothers for perpetuating perceived intergenerational welfare dependency. It also ignores the fact that many claimants, including mothers, want to undertake paid work but are constrained by barriers to employment such as the lack of job opportunities that are compatible with caring responsibilities (Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018; Graham and McQuaid, 2014). Lastly, the assumption that individuals will change their behaviour by responding in an economically rational manner to policy levers such as sanctions may fail to recognise the interdependency within decision making, and the influence of mothers' views of what it means to be a 'good mother' in relation to engagement in unpaid care and paid work (Barlow, Duncan and James, 2002). There is also limited evidence of the efficacy of conditionality which raises questions over the potential positive impacts of this policy on women who occupy a disadvantaged position in the paid labour market.

2.4 Conclusion

Key elements of addressing the historical and current gendered citizenship framework in the UK include increasing the recognition and valuing of women's unpaid care, promoting their participation in the paid labour market and enlarging their agency regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work. However, the increasing implementation of conditionality may work against feminist aims to create a more gender inclusive citizenship framework as it makes access to social rights conditional on paid work-related behaviour. Due to this emphasis on the primacy of paid work, concerns have been raised that the implementation of conditionality policies in the UK by New Labour, the Coalition government and the subsequent Conservative governments further devalue unpaid care (Cain, 2016; Davies, 2015; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Grabham and Smith, 2010; Conaghan, 2009). Within the conditionality discourse, unpaid care is viewed as a

barrier to paid work (Davies, 2015; Deacon and Patrick, 2011) and there is a lack of attention paid to the relational and affective orientation of unpaid care. As such, this policy measure may devalue unpaid care, fail to recognise interdependency and erode a motherhood identity which is important to many women. While conditionality may initially appear to improve women's participation in the paid labour market, there are concerns that the application of conditionality to mothers exacerbates women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011; MacLeavy, 2011; Grabham and Smith, 2010; Grover, 2007; MacLeavy, 2007). The failure to recognise that women often do not obtain the rewards of paid work and have difficulty progressing in paid work, coupled with the research that shows conditionality can result in claimants obtaining low-paid, insecure jobs, suggests mothers with few financial resources may be compelled into entering paid work that does not confer economic security and independence. Also, rather than enlarging women's agency through promoting genuine choice regarding unpaid care and paid work (Lewis, 1997), concerns have been raised that conditionality policies implemented in the UK deny mothers the choice to care and restrict their agency in regard to decisions about their engagement in the paid labour market (Millar, 2019; Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Davies, 2015, 2012; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Grabham and Smith, 2010). This is particularly likely given the power imbalance between state and claimants wherein claimants have little choice in 'agreeing' to mandatory work-related requirements (Grover, 2012; Standing, 2011; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b; Goodin, 2001).

While there is a considerable amount of literature that raises concerns about the implications of conditionality for women's citizenship, most of this is speculative rather than evidence based. The majority of the existing research in the UK (Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018; Graham and McQuaid, 2014; Goodwin, 2008) has mainly focused on the effects of conditionality on lone parents' employment outcomes; however, this has not been explored nor analysed from a gender perspective. Empirical research investigating conditionality and coupled mothers is more limited and UK evidence is mainly confined to research in which elite interviews with stakeholders in the policy process were conducted (Ingold and Etherington, 2013). As such, there is a limited amount of empirical research specifically investigating how conditionality affects women's citizenship roles and responsibilities

in respect of unpaid care and paid work. The next chapter discusses Universal Credit and how the conditionality regime within this new benefit may specifically impact women's roles as unpaid carers, their position in the paid labour market and their agency.

Chapter 3: Policy context: Universal Credit overview and conditionality for lead carers

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature concerning Universal Credit generally and the conditionality within Universal Credit for lead carers specifically. The first section explores the debates relating to the conception and implementation of Universal Credit. The second section details the new conditionality regime for lead carers within Universal Credit and discusses concerns raised in the literature relevant to women's citizenship. This review demonstrates that Universal Credit may struggle to meet its aims and that it adversely impacts claimants. It then shows that the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit may have negative implications for the citizenship of low-income women in particular and presents the need to investigate whether gender concerns raised in the literature are realised in the lives of mothers subject to conditionality.

3.2 Universal Credit overview

This section reviews the government, academic and grey literature concerning Universal Credit. Section 3.2.1 outlines the history of this new benefit from its inception in the work of the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) to current roll-out progress. Section 3.2.2 presents and discusses the assumptions and aims of Universal Credit. Section 3.2.3 explores the design and delivery elements of Universal Credit.

3.2.1 History of Universal Credit

Universal Credit has its origins in the CSJ, a think tank founded by Ian Duncan Smith in 2004 aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty (Duncan Smith, 2017; Haddon, 2012). Following an investigation into five perceived causes of poverty (family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness and economic dependence, addictions, and indebtedness), the CSJ started looking at options for simplifying the

benefits system (Haddon, 2012). Others were also considering benefit simplification. In a report reviewing the welfare-to-work programme commissioned by the Labour Party, Freud (2007) recommended further debate and investigation of moving to a single benefits system. However, the Labour Party did not pursue this due to the financial expenditure and timespan required and lack of approval from both the Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the Treasury (Timmins, 2016). Also Sainsbury and Stanley (2007) and the Institute for Fiscal Studies (Mirrlees et al., 2011) explored models for benefit simplification; however, the CSJ was the first to undertake detailed modelling of a single benefits system. This modelling was based on financial logic but also on CSJ philosophy of individual responsibility (Haddon, 2012). The CSJ then carried out further extensive work on the costings and implementation of this new benefit and, during work with Freud, devised Universal Credit.

The opportunity to implement Universal Credit arose when Duncan Smith was appointed as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions following the 2010 election. He took the appointment on the condition he could carry out major benefit reform (Haddon, 2012). While the Prime Minister, David Cameron, agreed to this, the Treasury was opposed to Universal Credit in large part due to the cost of welfare reform (Timmins, 2016; Haddon, 2012). As a concession to the Treasury, the DWP published a Green Paper entitled '21st Century Welfare' which outlined five options for simplifying the benefits system; however, it was clear that Duncan Smith and the DWP favoured Universal Credit (Timmins, 2016; Haddon, 2012; Sainsbury, 2010). Following negotiations with the Treasury in which Duncan Smith agreed to making cuts to the welfare bill in exchange for the budget to implement Universal Credit (Timmins, 2016; Haddon, 2012), Universal Credit was incorporated into the October 2010 Spending Review. In November of the same year the DWP published 'Universal Credit: welfare that works', a White Paper which described the new benefit. Council Tax Support was excluded due to a Coalition government devolution requirement (Timmins, 2016). The Welfare Reform Act 2012, passed in March 2012, outlined the framework for Universal Credit and the Universal Credit Regulations 2013, passed in March 2013, provided the detailed policy for this new benefit. Amendments to the Universal Credit legislation were passed in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016. Key changes included increasing the conditionality for

lead carers within Universal Credit by lowering the thresholds (the age of the youngest child) for work-related requirements. The threshold for job search requirements was lowered from five to three years. The threshold for work preparation requirements was lowered from three to two years and for work focused interview requirements from two years to one year.

Originally, Universal Credit was going to be implemented between 2013 and 2017. Following early problems, particularly with the new information technology system required for Universal Credit, the roll-out period was extended and a twin-track approach was adopted. This involved implementing both a Live Service (involving making a claim online but managing it by telephone) and a Full Service (involving both making and managing claims online). There have been several further delays to the roll-out schedule (Kennedy and Keen, 2018). The rollout of Universal Credit began in April 2013 to simple cases (single, unemployed claimants without any children and who were not homeowners) in one site in the UK. Further sites were added and in 2015 there was national rollout to all single claimants. Also in 2015, some sites began to accept claims from families with children. In 2016 the DWP began rolling out the Full Service which incorporated the final digital version of Universal Credit and applied to all claimant groups. The rollout of the Full Service was complete by the end of 2018. When the fieldwork for this thesis began in September 2018, there were 1.2 million people claiming Universal Credit, of which, fifty-two percent were female (DWP, 2018d). Table 1 on the next page shows the number of Universal Credit claimants by gender, age and employment as of September 2018.

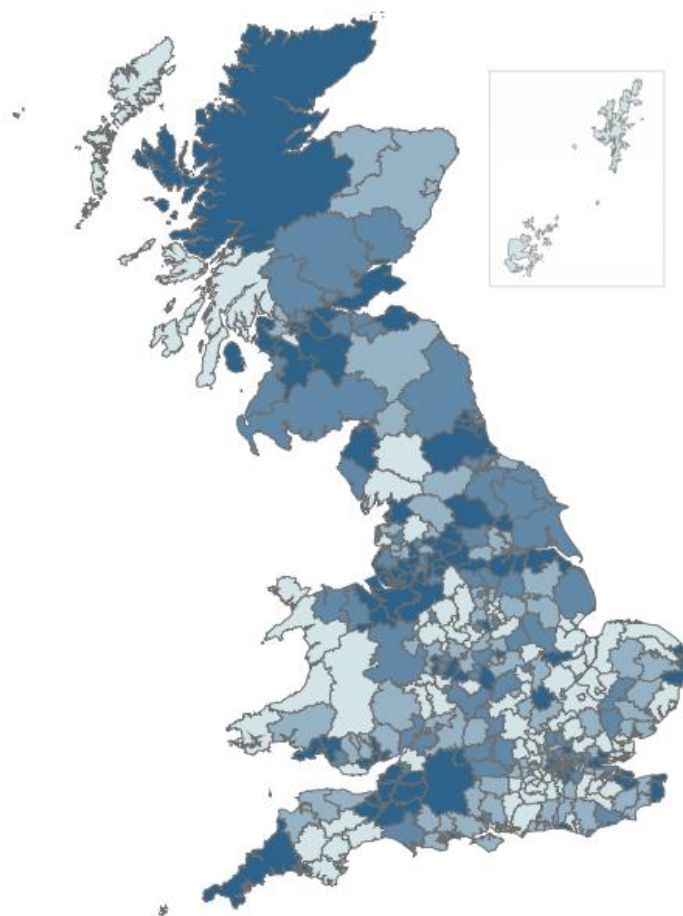
Table 1 Number of Universal Credit claimants by age, gender and employment as of September 2018

Characteristic	Number of Universal Credit claimants
Gender	
Male	586,928
Female	636,044
Unknown or missing gender	544
Age	
16-24	257,323
25-49	728,008
50+	237,906
Unknown or missing age	275
Employment	
Not in employment	793,159
In employment	430,359
Total	1,223,515

Source: DWP, 2018b

As there has been a gradual roll-out of Universal Credit, the distribution of claimants across the UK is uneven. Figure 1 on the next page shows people on Universal Credit by local authority as of September 2018. The darker areas of the map depict local authorities with higher numbers of Universal Credit claimants and the lighter areas show local authorities with fewer Universal Credit claimants.

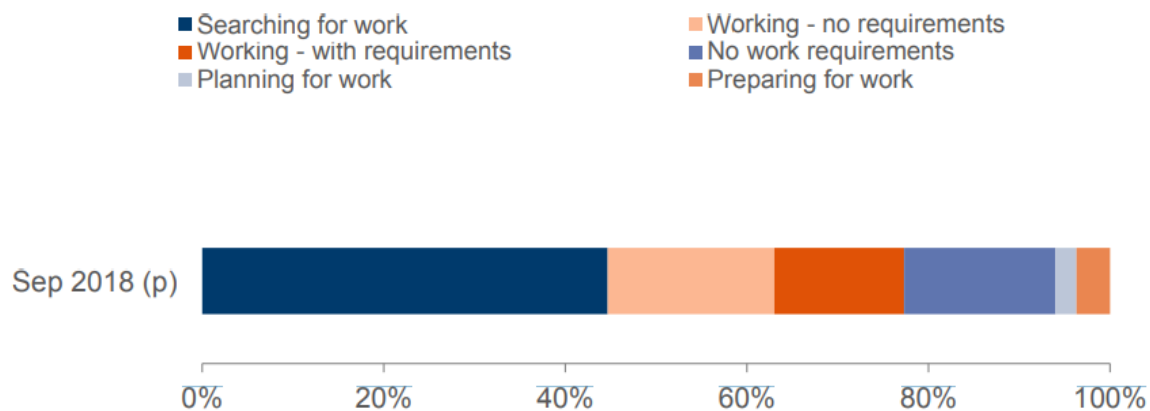
Figure 1 People on Universal Credit by local authority as of September 2018



Source: DWP, 2018d

There are different categories of work-related requirements within Universal Credit. As of September 2018, forty-five percent of claimants were subject to job search requirements and fourteen percent were subject to in-work conditionality (see Section 3.2.3) as shown in Figure 2 on the next page:

Figure 2 People on Universal Credit by conditionality regime as of September 2018



Source: DWP, 2018d

Remaining benefit and tax credit claimants are expected to be transferred to Universal Credit by September 2024 (House of Commons Library, 2020). Some benefit and tax credit claimants will transition to Universal Credit earlier should they have a change of circumstances such as losing a job or forming a couple relationship with a Universal Credit claimant (DWP, 2019a). Thus despite setbacks, Universal Credit is becoming increasingly established.

3.2.2 Aims and assumptions of Universal Credit

The aims of Universal Credit are to simplify the benefits system, improve financial incentives to undertake paid work, reduce poverty, make the benefits system fairer and more affordable, and reduce error and fraud (DWP, 2012b, 2010c). In the initial Universal Credit literature (DWP, 2010b, 2010c), the government argued that the complexity and low financial incentives of entering paid work within the legacy benefits system prevent people from entering paid work. Regarding complexity, the government referred to the various in-work and out-of-work benefits of the legacy system administered by three different agencies which interact in different ways. It claimed that as a result of this complexity, people do not know the financial gains from paid work and are deterred from entering paid work due to the disconnect between the different benefits (as there is a risk of delayed payments when

transferring between in-work and out-of-work benefits). The government also claimed that the complexity of the legacy benefits system results in lower take-up of benefits and increased opportunities for error and fraud. Concerning financial incentives, the government pointed to problems with both high marginal deduction rates—the rate at which earned income is lost due to benefit withdrawal and taxes—and the various hours rules in the benefits system. Under the legacy system, some people face exceptionally high marginal deduction rates of up to almost ninety-six percent when they enter paid work (DWP, 2010c). The hours rules of the different benefits were also perceived to disincentivise paid work. For example, under the legacy system, those working fewer than sixteen hours a week can be eligible for out-of-work benefits, but many see little financial gain from working these hours due to the high rate of benefit withdrawal (Browne, Hood and Joyce, 2016).

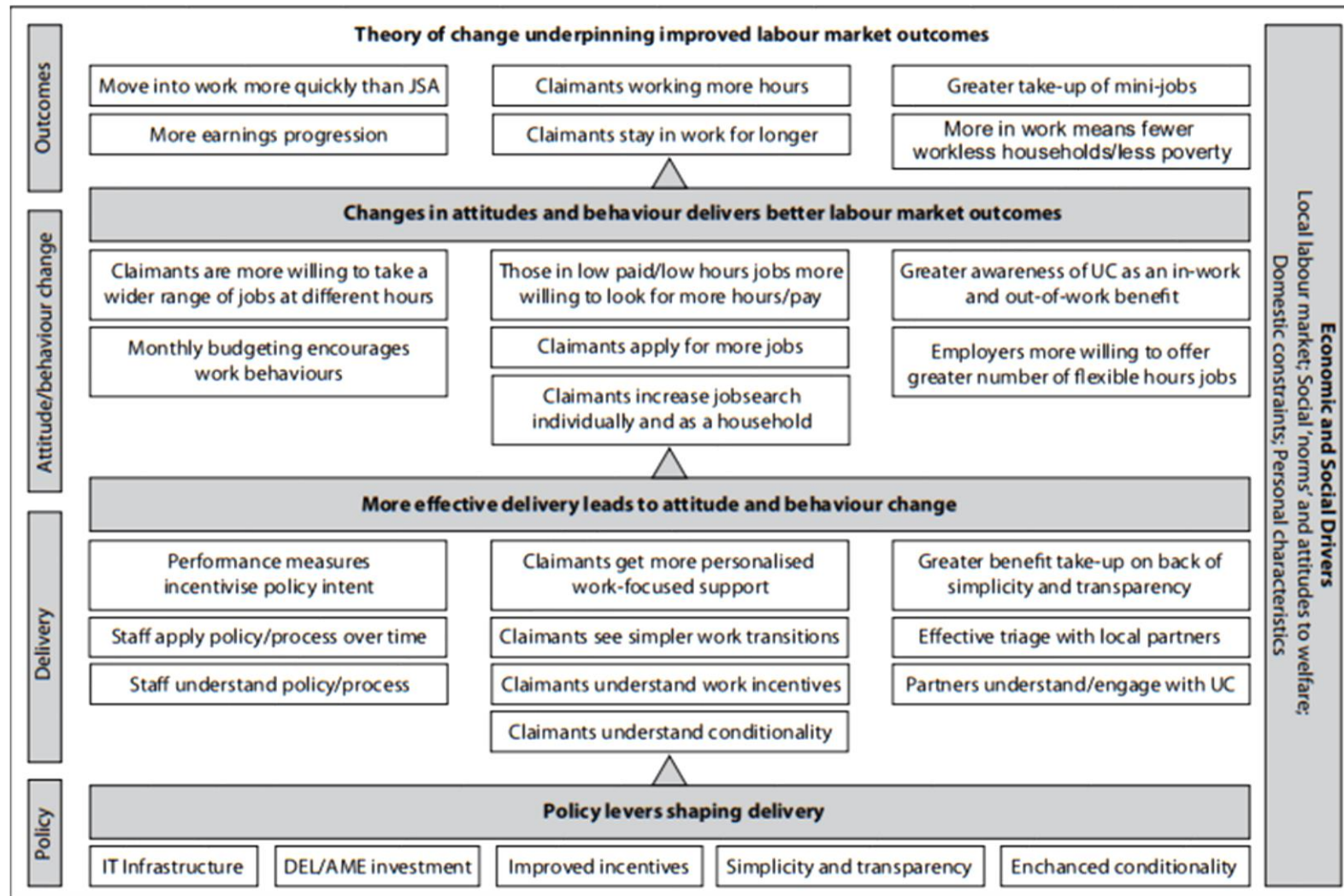
Drawing on the discourse of the New Right thinkers of the 1980s (Kowalewska, 2015) (see Chapter 2.3.2) the government has contended that the complexity and poor work incentives of the legacy system leads to worklessness and welfare dependency (DWP, 2015c, 2014a, 2010b, 2010c). Welfare dependency is portrayed in the Universal Credit literature as a sizable, growing and costly problem in the UK and worklessness is conceived to be a generational problem affecting households and communities. The initial Universal Credit literature contains references to the need to reinforce “pro-work social norms” (DWP, 2010c, p.59) and “reintroduce the culture of work in households where it may have been absent for generations” (DWP, 2010c, p.3). The government claimed that worklessness and dependency result in unsustainable financial costs to the exchequer and social costs to the country, and are a root cause of poverty (2010b, 2010c). As such, the legacy system was perceived to maintain, rather than address, poverty by undermining paid work and facilitating poor choices and undesirable behaviour.

The government’s solution to the perceived problems of the benefits system was to re-orient it around paid work, as this was considered the best route out of poverty (DWP, 2010b, 2010c). Referencing a report commissioned by the DWP (Waddell and Burton, 2006) which extolled the value of paid work, the government argued that paid work is beneficial to physical and mental health, improves children’s prospects and prevents perpetual generational worklessness (Work and Pensions Committee,

2015). Undertaking paid work has also been portrayed as necessary for full citizenship. The government explained that it wanted to "create a welfare system that provides people with the confidence and security to play a full part in society through a flexible labour market within a competitive modern economy" (2010c, p.12). Taking any paid work is perceived to be beneficial due to the government's belief that this increases the likelihood of increasing earnings and securing employment (DWP, 2017b). Thus the introduction of Universal Credit is intended to increase moves into paid employment of any type and increase progression (in terms of the number of work hours and pay levels) in the paid labour market (DWP, 2017b, 2010b, 2010c).

To increase entry and progression in paid work, Universal Credit policy aims to change behaviours and attitudes towards the benefits system and paid work (DWP, 2017b; Sainsbury, 2014a; DWP, 2016, 2012b). Duncan Smith explained, "Universal Credit itself is about the cultural shift that improves the likelihood of people going back to work" (Work and Pensions Committee, 2013, p.2). As such, Universal Credit is underpinned by the 'Theory of Change' (illustrated in Figure 3 on the next page). The government anticipates that changes in the benefits system (particularly increased incentives, simplification and intensified conditionality) will interact with individual circumstances and attitudes (and where relevant override these) to result in improved labour market outcomes (DWP, 2017b). This Theory of Change is being used as a framework to evaluate Universal Credit (DWP, 2017b, 2016, 2012b). By implementing Universal Credit, the government also aspires to move people from dependence on the state to independence regarding not only paid work but also the way claimants manage their finances (DWP, 2014a). Thus Universal Credit is intended to have far reaching impacts on the views and actions of claimants.

Figure 3 The Universal Credit Theory of Change



Source: DWP, 2017b

There has been a mixed response to the rationale and aims of Universal Credit. The aims to improve financial incentives and simplify the benefits system have garnered support from across the political spectrum (Millar and Bennett, 2017; Work and Pensions Committee, 2017; Sainsbury, 2014b) and have in the main been commended (for example, Work and Pensions Committee, 2017; Finch, 2015b; Citizens Advice, 2011; Sainsbury, 2010). The government's acknowledgement that the previous benefits system could hinder transitions into paid work and its attempts to address this have been welcomed (Schmuecker, 2018; Bennett, 2011; Lister, 2011b). However, some have objected to benefit simplification on the basis that the complexity of the benefits system reflects complexity in claimants' lives (Millar, 2015; Spicker, 2013; Wiggan, 2012) and as such, attempts to reduce complexity will inevitably mean that some societal groups are disadvantaged (Spicker, 2012). There have also been cautions regarding the emphasis on financial incentives as other factors both motivate and deter people from entering paid work (Spicker, 2013; Dean, 2012; Sainsbury, 2010) and for some individuals, stability of income may be as important as level of earnings (Spicker, 2012). Implementing a single benefit that makes work pay is also problematic in that those who are not engaged in paid work for legitimate reasons will always be poorer than those who are in paid work. This may in effect penalise those who are disabled, have ill health or make essential societal contributions such as undertaking unpaid care.

Other underlying assumptions and aims of Universal Credit have been contested. The Universal Credit literature implies that at its core, poverty is a result of claimants' personal deficiencies in attitudes, behaviour and choices (Wiggan, 2012; Veitch and Bennett, 2010). The five pathways to poverty identified by the CSJ and referred to in the Universal Credit literature (DWP, 2010b) imply that poverty is a result of individual or family failings in behaviour (Wiggan, 2012). These pathways were presented as root causes of poverty: there was no consideration that the pathways could derive from, rather than cause, poverty. The portrayal of poverty as a result of individual failings is also evident in the frequent use of the terms "worklessness" and "welfare dependency" in the government literature on Universal Credit (for example, DWP, 2014a, 2010c). The intention to change behaviour and attitudes towards paid work and the benefits system further conveys the perception that poverty is the result of individual defects in actions and outlook. With the exception of the barriers to paid

work within the benefits system, there is scant mention of structural causes of poverty and unemployment in the Universal Credit literature. As Wiggan explains, “the problem of poverty and unemployment is transformed from evidence of market failure and income inadequacy under neo-liberal hegemony to one of state and personal failure” (2012, p.401). Thus there are highly contestable assumptions regarding the causes of poverty: claimants are blamed for the poverty they experience and made responsible for improving their circumstances.

There have also been objections to the central priority inherent within Universal Credit to increase movements into paid work. The Resolution Foundation (Brewer, Finch and Tomlinson, 2017; Finch 2016, 2015b) has argued that unemployment was not a considerable problem at the inception of Universal Credit and that since then, the number of households in which nobody works has reached a record low (these claims were made prior to the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic which has seen rises in unemployment). Instead, low pay has been a persistent problem in the United Kingdom. In 2018, 17.2 percent of employees in the UK were in low pay (Cominetti, Henehan and Clarke, 2019) and during the 2017-2018 financial year 69 percent of children in relative low income lived in households in which at least one adult was in paid work (DWP, 2019b). In contrast to the government's view that any paid work is likely to improve earnings over time, research has shown that low-paid, part-time work is unlikely to result in improved employment prospects (D’Arcy and Finch, 2017; Thompson, 2015). Instead, people either remain in low-paid work or follow the cycle between low-paid work and unemployment. As such, particularly before the coronavirus pandemic, a shift in the focus of Universal Credit from unemployment to low pay and the quality of paid work (especially given the rise in precarious employment such as zero-hours contracts) was required (Brewer, Finch and Tomlinson, 2017; Field and Forsey, 2016; Judge, 2013; Veitch and Bennett, 2010).

The focus in Universal Credit on moving people into paid work and increasing progression in the paid labour market also fails to recognise that the benefits system has a much broader scope and purpose than increasing employment rates and earnings. The benefits system has multiple functions, including preventing poverty, re-distributing wealth and providing social protection, particularly for those who

cannot undertake paid work due to crises or ill-health and for those who undertake unpaid care of children and the elderly (Millar, 2015; Bennett, 2011; Veitch and Bennett, 2010). Thus the aspiration of Universal Credit to reorient the benefits system around paid work reflects an overly narrow conception of the welfare state (Millar and Bennett, 2017). It marginalises those who cannot engage in paid work for legitimate reasons: for some in receipt of Universal Credit, undertaking paid work is not a possibility and centring the welfare state on paid work undermines the genuine entitlement they have to social protection. It also devalues other socially valid contributions such as caring and volunteering (Richards-Gray, 2020; Veitch and Bennett, 2010).

The Universal Credit Theory of Change and the aim to change behaviours and attitudes towards paid work are also contested. Given it is not possible for individual claimants to change the paid labour market (Millar and Bennett, 2017), the Theory of Change overestimates individual capacity to reduce personal poverty. There are also ethical questions regarding the aim to change (and override) behaviours and attitudes. Within the Universal Credit literature, certain assumptions such as the prevalence of welfare dependency and the primacy of paid work are presented as undisputed facts (Wiggan, 2012). However, these are contested assumptions and it is questionable whether the government should try to enforce a particular ideology regarding paid work onto benefit claimants (see Chapter 2.3.3). The contested aims and assumptions behind Universal Credit have influenced the design and delivery of this policy, and these have also been debated, as discussed in the next subsection.

3.2.3 Universal Credit design and delivery

The Universal Credit framework has been “designed to produce positive behavioural effects” (DWP, 2010b, p.2) to move people off benefits and into paid work. The design is also intended to mimic paid work to help ease the transition into it (Work and Pensions Committee, 2017). This includes instituting a different relationship between claimants and the DWP wherein the DWP is portrayed as an employer who pays people for job search of up to thirty-five hours a week (Couling, 2016; Timmins, 2016). Thus the design of Universal Credit is intended to both promote and replicate the world of paid work (Millar and Bennett, 2017). It attempts to achieve this and

other aims of Universal Credit by making five key changes to the legacy system: increasing financial incentives to undertake paid work, simplifying the system, transferring responsibility for household budgeting to claimants, increasing conditionality and introducing online claims and account management.

Improving financial incentives to undertake paid work is portrayed as a central element of Universal Credit and is estimated to have significant impacts on employment rates (DWP, 2018c, 2010b). The Universal Credit design aims to improve financial incentives through increasing work allowances (the amount a claimant can earn before their Universal Credit payment is affected) and introducing a single taper at which this new benefit is withdrawn for any earnings above the work allowance. This is intended to eliminate both the high marginal deduction rates and the hours rules of the legacy system thereby strengthening incentives to both enter and progress in paid work (DWP, 2017b, 2010b, 2010c). A primary reason for making these changes is to remove barriers to part-time, flexible, temporary paid work (DWP, 2017b, 2010b, 2010c). This is a particular target of Universal Credit which is intended to reduce the number of workless households and provide a starting point for claimants to gain skills, experience and confidence, and view paid work as a route off benefits (DWP, 2010c). It is also intended to produce a more flexible workforce and a wider range of jobs in the economy (DWP, 2010c).

Since the inception of Universal Credit, the financial incentives have been weakened particularly for some groups of claimants. The work allowances have been removed for non-disabled childless single and couple claimants (Keen and Kennedy, 2016). For claimants with children and disabled claimants, the work allowances were repeatedly cut but were then increased considerably in April 2019 (Finch and Gardiner, 2018). The taper rate of sixty-three percent is also lower than the taper rate of fifty-five percent proposed by the CSJ. As a result of these changes, financial incentives to enter paid work vary according to family type. Financial incentives have increased for renting single parents and the first earner in renting couples with children, but have reduced for home-owners who are either single parents or the first earner in couples (Finch and Gardiner, 2018). Universal Credit also does little to incentivise progression in paid work (Finch and Gardiner, 2018). Of concern from a gender perspective, Universal Credit incentivises single parents to reduce working

hours below sixteen hours and weakens financial incentives for second earners in couples with children to enter paid work compared with the tax credit system (Finch and Gardiner, 2018).

The impact of increased work allowances and the single taper rate were originally envisaged to result in Universal Credit recipients receiving a similar or higher level of support than the legacy system, thereby reducing poverty (DWP, 2010c). However, due to the changes to the original design, along with other cuts in the benefits system such as the introduction of the two-child limit and the benefits freeze (see Chapter 1.2), this new benefit represents a reduction in entitlement overall (Brewer et al., 2019). While some claimants see gains in entitlement, a larger proportion of claimants see reductions, and of concern, Universal Credit disproportionately reduces the incomes of the poorest claimants (Brewer et al., 2019). An investigation into Universal Credit conducted by the Economic Affairs Committee of the House of Lords (2020) concluded that Universal Credit does not provide adequate levels of financial support and these levels need to be increased so that claimants avoid poverty and hardship.

Measures to simplify the benefits system are also central to the design of Universal Credit. In addition to the single taper rate, simplification measures include merging six key benefits into one benefit administered by one agency (the DWP) and introducing a Real Time Information (RTI) system. The single taper rate is intended to make it easier for claimants to calculate the financial gains from entering, and progressing in, paid work (DWP, 2010b). The anticipated benefits of merging six in-work and out-of-work benefits include reducing the financial risk of moving into paid work and removing the administrative barrier to entering paid work (DWP, 2012c). The RTI system requires employers to send earnings details electronically to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs when they pay their employees. The DWP then uses this information to calculate monthly payments. The RTI system is intended to address the problems of over and underpayments of the legacy system thereby ensuring claimants get the correct levels of support (DWP, 2010a, 2010c). It is also intended to ease administrative burdens (as employees do not need to report their earnings) and help people see the financial gains from paid work (DWP, 2010a, 2010c).

Some commentators have argued that rather than simplifying the system, a lot of the complexities of the legacy system have transferred to the Universal Credit system and new complexities for claimants have been created (Summers and Young, 2020; Judge, 2013; Spicker, 2013; Tarr and Finn, 2012). The exclusion of Council Tax Support from Universal Credit has undermined the aim to simplify the system. For many claimants, there is not a single taper because Council Tax Support has a separate taper rate (Alakeson, Brewer and Finch, 2015; Tarr and Finn, 2012). In addition, claimants have to report to two agencies and fill out multiple application forms, and may therefore find it difficult to calculate the financial gains from paid work (Browne, Hood and Joyce, 2016; Alakeson, Brewer and Finch, 2015; Finch, Corlett and Alakeson, 2014; Tarr and Finn, 2012). Additionally, merging six benefits into one benefit means that should there be a delay or other issue with the payment, claimants could be left with no income, inevitably resulting in hardship (Timmins, 2016; Millar, 2015; CPAG, 2011). Also, while overpayments in the tax credit system were a significant problem and improvements in responsiveness to the current system were needed (Millar and Bennett, 2017; CPAG, 2011), the RTI system brings challenges of its own. The system is arguably now too responsive resulting in Universal Credit payments that vary from month to month (Millar and Whiteford, 2020). This may be problematic for claimants, for whom stability of income is important (Millar and Whiteford, 2020; Millar and Bennett, 2017). While the RTI system may result in less administration for the employed regarding reporting earnings, it increases the administrative burden for the self-employed and parents with formal childcare costs who are responsible for monthly reporting (Finch, 2015a).

Further key changes introduced by Universal Credit include the implementation of a monthly payment and payment of the housing element directly to the household. This differs from the legacy system in that legacy benefits are paid on a weekly, fortnightly or four weekly basis, and Housing Benefit is paid directly to the landlord for social housing tenants (Hickman et al., 2017). The government's aim is to transfer responsibility for household budgeting to claimants thereby promoting independence and personal responsibility (DWP, 2014a, 2010c). The monthly payment (which is paid in arrears) and payment of the housing element directly to the household are intended to replicate the world of paid work and therefore ease

transitions into paid work as claimants will already be accustomed to managing a monthly salary and paying their own rent (DWP, 2015a, 2014a).

Several objections have been raised to the introduction of monthly payments under Universal Credit. While the government has argued that monthly payments mirror paid work (DWP, 2010c), Millar and Bennett (2017) have countered that according to the government's own figures, for those earning under £10 000 a year, only around half are paid monthly. Those who receive monthly wages and pay their rent or mortgage monthly may welcome monthly payments, (Millar and Bennett, 2017; Hartfree, 2014). However, for many claimants, monthly payments do not reflect the world of paid work and many on a low income have developed budgeting strategies for weekly or fortnightly budgeting and therefore may find the transition to monthly payments difficult (Millar and Bennett, 2017; Hartfree, 2014). The government recognised some of the difficulties claimants may face in receiving a monthly payment and initially introduced Universal Support, a programme to deliver local support to help claimants with the transition to Universal Credit. This was superseded from April 2019 by Help to Claim (delivered by Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Universal Credit recipients are experiencing difficulties in managing the monthly payments (Gardiner and Finch, 2020; Robertson, Wright and Stewart, 2020).

The monthly payment in arrears also presents substantial difficulties for claimants at the beginning of a Universal Credit claim. By design, many Universal Credit claimants must wait at least five weeks before receiving their first payment (before February 2018 claimants had to wait for six weeks). This consists of a one month assessment period in which the claimant's entitlement is assessed based on their income and seven days for processing the claim (DWP, 2020a). Evidence shows that as a result of the five week wait, claimants are suffering financial hardship, increasingly having to use foodbanks and accumulating debt (Gardiner and Finch, 2020; Patrick and Simpson, 2020; Robertson, Wright and Stewart, 2020; Cheetham et al., 2019). To help ease this problem, the government is offering advance payments. However, this is deducted from subsequent Universal Credit payments and as a result, claimants who receive advance payments start out in debt and can experience long term financial problems (Patrick and Simpson, 2020; Robertson,

Wright and Stewart, 2020). The delay in receiving the first payment and the direct payment of the housing element to the household rather than the landlord, along with delays in administration, have also led to rent arrears (National Audit Office, 2020; Cheetham et al., 2019; Hickman et al., 2017). To try to resolve the problem of rent arrears under Universal Credit, the DWP has introduced alternative payment arrangements, whereby payments can be made direct to landlords. However, as alternative payment arrangements can only be requested after tenants have fallen into rent arrears, these do not prevent the problem from occurring (Brewer, Finch and Tomlinson, 2017).

The intensification and expansion of conditionality under Universal Credit is also intended to encourage personal responsibility as well as incentivise claimants to enter and progress in paid work, reduce claimant's dependence on the state and increase economic productivity (Work and Pensions Committee, 2016a; DWP, 2014a, 2010c). Key changes include intensifying the work-related requirements of the legacy regime (for example, by requiring up to thirty-five hours of weekly job search) and expanding conditionality to include partners with children and those undertaking low paid work (DWP, 2011a, 2010c). The implementation of Universal Credit also involves a more severe benefits sanctions regime. Table 2 on the next page illustrates the sanctions regime that was in operation during the course of the fieldwork (in November 2019 the length of the highest level sanctions was reduced to 182 days).

In a considerable departure from previous policy, Universal Credit also introduces in-work conditionality which subjects those in paid work with low earnings to work-related requirements (see Section 3.3.2 for how this policy operates for lone and coupled mothers). There have also been changes to paid work requirements of self-employed claimants. Following a one year start-up period in which newly self-employed claimants are subject to certain work-related requirements, the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) is applied. The MIF is the level of earnings the government expects an employed person to be earning in similar circumstances. The MIF is applied monthly and if self-employed earnings are below the MIF, the claimant's payment is based on the MIF rather than actual earnings (DWP, 2020d). Universal Credit also introduces a Claimant Commitment which sets out individual work-related

requirements and the sanctions for non-compliance. In order to receive Universal Credit payments, a claimant must accept an individualised Claimant Commitment. The Claimant Commitment is intended to mirror an employment contract, thereby creating the impression that looking for paid work is a job itself, and provide increased clarity of work-related requirements and sanctions for non-compliance (DWP, 2015c, 2014a).

Table 2 Universal Credit sanctions regime 2013-2019

Level of sanction	Length of sanction		
	First failure	Second failure within a year	Third failure within a year
High level sanctions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to undertake Mandatory Work Activity • Failing to apply for or to accept paid work • Ceasing paid work or losing pay for specified reasons 	91 days	182 days	1095 days
Medium level sanctions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to be available for paid work or to take all reasonable action to get paid work 	28 days	91 days	91 days
Low level sanctions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to meet a work-focused interview requirement • Failing to comply with a requirement connected to a work related requirement • Failing to meet a work preparation requirement • Failing to take a particular action to get paid work 	Until claimant complies, plus 7 days	Until claimant complies, plus 14 days	Until claimant complies, plus 28 days
Lowest level sanctions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failing to meet a work-focused interview requirement 	Until claimant complies	Until claimant complies	Until claimant complies

Source: Kennedy and Keen, 2016

Various objections have been raised to the Universal Credit conditionality regime. While the government has stressed that the conditionality changes represent a new, two-way relationship between claimants and the state (DWP, 2015c), there is an imbalance in this relationship. The Claimant Commitment sets out recipients' responsibilities in detail; however, it does not set out the government's reciprocal responsibilities nor claimants' rights (Field and Forsey, 2016; Tarr and Finn, 2012; Veitch and Bennett, 2010). The government has claimed it is improving financial incentives in return for increased conditionality (DWP, 2010b, 2010c). However, many brought into the conditionality regime, such as those in low-paid work and claimants with children and a working partner, face weaker financial incentives under Universal Credit (Browne, Hood and Joyce, 2016; Finch, 2016). Furthermore, the increased intrusion and control brought about by the conditionality changes also appear to contradict with the aims to increase claimants' personal responsibility and independence from the state (Millar and Bennett, 2017; Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017).

The introduction of in-work conditionality appears at odds with the aim to remove barriers to flexible, part-time, temporary work. Perhaps, as Rafferty and Wiggan contend, the reforms "seek to influence participation at both the extensive and intensive margin of employment" (2017, p.519). In-work conditionality is questionable given those in paid work are clearly already motivated to undertake paid work and barriers to further work are often due to structural factors or personal circumstances (Work and Pensions Committee, 2016a). Also, in-work conditionality may be ineffective as claimants have very limited control over levels of pay and work hours (Work and Pensions Committee, 2016a). In-work conditionality may also be ineffective in addressing low pay as in-work conditionality concentrates on the number of hours worked rather than pay progression (Finch, 2015b). The SSAC (2015) also warns of other potential adverse effects of in-work conditionality: it could cause anxiety and resentment, fail to recognise the multiple demands of everyday life and jeopardise relationships with work coaches. Existing evidence shows that it is counterproductive and is experienced as punitive and unjust (Wright and Dwyer, 2020).

A final key change introduced by Universal Credit is a 'digital by default' system. Under this, the majority of claimants make and manage claims for Universal Credit

online. This is intended to increase claimant independence and responsibility for their claims and job searching, and help people learn digital skills to help them search for, and acquire, jobs (DWP, 2015b, 2012a). It is also intended to help the DWP provide personalised support and a more informative and responsive service, and reduce administration costs, error and fraud (DWP, 2010). Commentators have expressed concern that this may disadvantage particular groups of people, such as those with disabilities, people living in rural areas and women, who are all less likely to use the internet (SSAC, 2015; Watling, 2011). In addition, the information technology systems may not be able to respond accurately to claimants' circumstances due to the complexity in claimants' lives and lack of the necessary knowledge of claimants' local contexts (Seddon and O'Donovan, 2013). Evidence suggests current Universal Credit recipients are having difficulty both making and managing claims online in part due to health conditions and lack of computer and internet access, leading to delays and errors with payments (Cheetham et al., 2019; Foley, 2017; NAWRA, 2017).

Overall, the contested underlying assumptions of Universal Credit and the issues with the design and delivery may make the aims of this new benefit, particularly the reduction of poverty, difficult to achieve. Brewer, Finch and Tomlinson have argued that “unnecessarily poor policy choices” within Universal Credit were derived from “attempts to make short-term savings or from misguided attempts at concentrating on altering human behaviour rather than supporting people in need” (2017, p.15). The most vulnerable are particularly likely to find the new complexities hard to manage (Judge, 2013) and research has found that Universal Credit has negative impacts on vulnerable claimants' mental health and increases the risk of poverty (Cheetham et al., 2019). Early evidence also suggests the main policy levers of Universal Credit are struggling to achieve their aims of changing behaviours and attitudes towards paid work. Research conducted by NatGen for the DWP investigating how Universal Credit affects change in labour market behaviour found that the measures concerning financial incentives and benefit simplification had little effect on labour market behaviour (DWP, 2017b). Conditionality measures were more effective, but at times resulted in compliance-based—rather than meaningful and productive—changes in job search behaviour. Thus the implementation of Universal Credit may not achieve its objectives and the evidence to date shows it

can have considerable negative impacts on some groups of claimants. The next section discusses the conditionality within Universal Credit for lead carers and the potential implications of this policy for mothers.

3.3 Conditionality for lead carers

This section reviews the government, academic and grey literature relevant to the conditionality within Universal Credit for lead carers. Section 3.3.1 outlines the history of conditionality for lone and coupled mothers in the UK. Section 3.3.2 details the Universal Credit conditionality regime for lead carers. Section 3.3.3 summarises the existing literature concerning Universal Credit and gender. Section 3.3.4 explores the concerns about the conditionality within Universal Credit raised in the academic and grey literature that relate to key issues pertaining to women's citizenship: the valuing of unpaid care, women's position in the paid labour market and women's agency.

3.3.1 History of conditionality for lone and coupled mothers

Prior to the introduction of Universal Credit, lone and coupled mothers in the UK were under different conditionality regimes. Previously, main carers of children in couples were subject to minimal work-related requirements, whereas lone parents have been particular targets of increased conditionality (Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Wright, 2011). At the beginning of New Labour's time in office (1997-2010), there was a relatively light conditionality regime for lone parents in the UK in comparison with other OECD countries: lone parents were not required to look for paid work until their youngest child left school at the age of either sixteen or eighteen (Johnsen, 2014; Haux, 2012). Under the welfare reforms of New Labour, conditionality for lone parents increased incrementally. From 2001 onwards, mandatory 'work focused interviews' were introduced for those in receipt of IS. At this time, there was no mandatory requirement to seek paid work (Whitworth, 2013).

A key change was made in 2008 when lone parents with a youngest child aged twelve or above became ineligible for IS and had to claim JSA instead (Wright, 2011). The age threshold was subsequently lowered to ten years in 2009 and seven

years in 2010. As recipients of JSA, lone parents were treated similarly to other JSA claimants and were required to sign on every fortnight and be available for, and actively seek, paid work (Johnsen, 2014; Haux, 2012). Claimants had to demonstrate that they were actively seeking paid work by carrying out a certain number of specific work-search steps each week such as preparing a CV or contacting potential employers (Kennedy, 2010; Petrongolo, 2009). Lone parents were also subject to the stronger sanctions regime of JSA as compared to IS (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017). In an attempt to recognise the impact caring responsibilities can have on lone parents' ability to seek and be available for paid work, 'lone parent flexibilities' were incorporated into the JSA regulations in 2008. There were twelve lone parent flexibilities (see Appendix A) which included claimants' rights to limit their working hours in line with their caring responsibilities, refuse a job offer if they could not find appropriate or affordable formal childcare provision and limit job search activity in certain circumstances such as during school holidays. However, research suggests that the lone parent flexibilities were not routinely communicated to claimants (Whitworth, 2012).

During New Labour's time in office, main carers of children in couples were not required to seek paid work. Main carers of children were labelled as the 'dependent partner' of the main claimant and work-related requirements were limited to work focused interviews introduced from 2004. Partners of ESA and IS recipients were required to attend a single work focused interview and partners of JSA recipients were mandated to attend one work focused interview every six months under the threat of sanction for non-compliance (DWP, 2011b; Dorsett, Haile and Speckesser, 2006). Thus, immediately prior to the implementation of Universal Credit, lone parents were subject to job search requirements from when the youngest child was aged seven and flexibilities were available in respect of caring responsibilities, and main carers of children in couples were subject to work focused interviews. Under Universal Credit, conditionality has been intensified for lone parents and mandatory work-search and preparation requirements have been extended to the main carer of children in couples, as detailed next.

3.3.2 Universal Credit conditionality regime for lead carers

In order to receive Universal Credit, claimants are required to accept an individual Claimant Commitment (DWP, 2020b). The Claimant Commitment details the claimant's specific work-related requirements including the mandated hours of job search and preparation, the claimant's availability for paid work and the time they need to travel to look for paid work. It also stipulates the sanctions that may be issued for non-compliance with work-related requirements. The Claimant Commitment is drawn up with the claimant's work coach as part of the claiming process but it can be subsequently reviewed and updated (DWP, 2020b). Couples must make a joint claim and both members of the couple need to accept their separate Claimant Commitments before they can receive Universal Credit payments. If one member of the couple receives a sanction, the couple's standard allowance is reduced by up to fifty percent (DWP, 2020a).

Under Universal Credit, couples with children are required to nominate one member of the couple as the 'lead carer' and lone parents are automatically designated the 'lead carer'. Lead carers are subject to different levels of work-related requirements depending on the age of the youngest child as shown in Table 3 on the next page. Work coaches have discretion in setting these work-related requirements. The government literature regarding lead carers states that the type and location of paid work, and the number of hours claimants need to be available for paid work will be tailored to their individual circumstances and caring responsibilities (DWP, 2020e, 2015e). The government also states that requirements for job search may be reduced if there is a lack of free and affordable childcare accessible to the claimant (DWP, 2020e). Additionally, easements can be applied which involve the reduction or removal of work-related requirements due to personal circumstances including domestic abuse, ill health, housing situations and temporary childcare requirements (DWP, 2020a). Some easements are a legal requirement (for example, in the case of domestic abuse); at other times they are at the discretion of the work coach (for example, in the case of temporary childcare requirements) (DWP, 2018g).

Table 3 Work-related requirements for lead carers

Age of your youngest child	Your responsibilities
Under 1	You don't need to look for work in order to receive Universal Credit.
Age 1	If you are not already working, you don't need to look for work in order to receive Universal Credit. You will be asked to attend work-focused interviews with your work coach to discuss plans for a future move into work and will need to report any changes of circumstances.
Age 2	You will be expected to take active steps to prepare for work. This will involve having regular work-focused interviews with your work coach, agreeing a programme of activities tailored to your individual circumstances which might include some training and work preparation activities (for example, writing your CV).
Age 3 or 4	You will be expected to work a maximum of 16 hours a week (or spend 16 hours a week looking for work) this might include some training and work-focused interviews.
Age between 5 and 12	You will be expected to work a maximum of 25 hours a week (or spend 25 hours a week looking for work) this might include some training and work-focused interviews.
Age 13 and above	You will be expected to work a maximum of 35 hours a week (or spend 35 hours a week looking for work) this might include some training and work-focused interviews.

Source: DWP, 2020e

Under Universal Credit, conditionality is applied to claimants whose earnings are below a prescribed level (DWP, 2017a). This is termed the 'Conditionality Earnings Threshold' (CET). The CET is calculated by multiplying the number of hours the claimant is expected to undertake paid work by the National Minimum Wage and then converting this figure to a monthly amount. For those with work focused interview requirements or work-preparation requirements, the CET is the National Minimum Wage multiplied by sixteen, converted to a monthly amount. Therefore, unemployed lone parents are subject to conditionality and lone parents in paid work can be subject to in-work conditionality (and potentially required to seek more hours, higher wages or a second job) if their earnings are below the CET applicable to them. Unemployed lead carers in couples are subject to conditionality if the other member of the couple is unemployed or his or her monthly earnings are below the sum of their individual thresholds (the household CET). Due to the presence of both the individual CET and the Household CET, the policy regarding in-work conditionality for couples is more complex (SSAC, 2017). Lead carers can be subject to in-work conditionality in a variety of scenarios. For example, if the household earnings are below the Household CET, individual earnings are considered. If the main earner is working full-time at the minimum wage, the lead carer can be subject to in-work conditionality if his or her earnings are below his or her individual CET. Consequently, the earnings of one partner affects the work-related requirements of the other, and if one partner's engagement in paid work changes this may alter the requirements of the other partner (DWP, 2020a).

The level of individual or household earnings also determines the intensity of conditionality that claimants are subject to. In addition to the CET, there is the Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET), which is a fixed amount.² Claimants earning below the AET are subject to intensive work-related conditions including job search (SSAC, 2017). Lone parent claimants earning between the AET and the CET are subject to a less intense conditionality regime termed 'light touch'³ and cannot be subject to job search or work availability requirements (DWP, 2018a; SSAC, 2017).

² At the time of the fieldwork the AET was £338 per month for single claimants and £541 for couples (Work and Pensions Committee, 2018a).

³ The specific policy for the light touch regime is yet to be finalised (Work and Pensions Committee, 2018a).

For coupled lead carers, household income is taken into account. For example, a coupled lead carer who is not undertaking paid work can be subject to the light touch regime if his or her partner is earning more than £541 but less than the Household CET. Consequently, Universal Credit particularly intensifies and expands conditionality to those who are unemployed or on the lowest of earnings.

The implementation of Universal Credit has also intensified conditionality for lone parents through the changes made to lone parent flexibilities (see Appendix A). The majority of the flexibilities have been downgraded to guidance and therefore do not have the authority of the law: their application is at the discretion of the individual's work coach (Cain, 2016). Flexibilities not taken into account in Universal Credit legislation include safeguards against the use of sanctions if lone parents are unable to take up a job offer or have to leave a job because of a lack of suitable childcare (Gingerbread, 2013). Also, those with children aged thirteen or older can only restrict their paid work hours according to their caring responsibilities if they can demonstrate that they have reasonable prospects of obtaining paid work within those reduced hours (Gingerbread, 2013).

Alongside the intensification of conditionality under Universal Credit, there has been an increase in state assistance with formal childcare provision. Universal Credit claimants can claim back up to eighty-five percent of their childcare costs (DWP, 2020e), which is an increase from the seventy percent provided under WTCs. This amount is capped at £646 for one child and £1108 for two or more children per month (DWP, 2020e). Childcare provision has also been expanded under Universal Credit through extending help with childcare costs to parents working less than sixteen hours per week (DWP, 2014b). In addition, some parents of three and four year olds in the general UK population are eligible for up to thirty hours per week (for thirty-eight weeks per year) of state funded formal childcare (HMG, 2018). This equates to 1140 hours per year and can be taken as the claimant wishes. For eligible parents, this is an increase from the fifteen hours per week available to all three and four year olds.

The government justified the intensification and expansion of conditionality for lead carers by contending that the changes would result in more parents moving into paid

work, which would subsequently enable them to participate fully in society, take financial responsibility for themselves and their children, reduce child poverty and improve children's long-term outcomes (DWP, 2015e, 2011a, 2011c). The government also argued that it is reasonable to expect lead carers of preschool children to undertake paid work given the government's funding of thirty hours per week of formal childcare (DWP, 2015e). In regard to coupled parents, the government referred to the previous policy whereby the main carer of the children was labelled as the 'dependent partner' and received minimal attention (DWP, 2011a, 2011b). The government also highlighted the previous disparity in conditionality regimes between lone parents and main carers in couples (House of Lords Hansard, 2015b). Concerning lone mothers, the government justified the intensification of conditionality by referring to DWP research findings showing the negative impacts on individuals, children and communities of long-term withdrawal from the paid labour market (DWP, 2011c).

As demonstrated above, the introduction of the conditionality regime for lead carers within Universal Credit has expanded and intensified the mandatory work-related requirements of lone parents and main carers of children in couples. The change is particularly significant for coupled main carers of children: the implementation of Universal Credit extends work preparation and job-search requirements to such claimants for the first time. Universal Credit policy also intensifies conditionality for lone parents through lowering the threshold (the age of the youngest child) at which they are expected to prepare for and look for paid work and increasing job-search requirements from a prescribed number of job-search activities to a mandated number of job-search hours (which can be up to thirty-five per week). Conditionality for lone parents has also been intensified under Universal Credit through the implementation of a more severe sanctions regime, the erosion of lone parent flexibilities and the introduction of conditionality for those in paid work. The changes in conditionality under Universal Credit also extend conditionality to both coupled and lone mothers unaffected under the previous system such as those in receipt of Housing Benefit and Tax Credits (which did not have any work-related conditions attached). Although Universal Credit policy is purportedly "gender neutral" and men and women are treated the same under Universal Credit (DWP 2012, p.23), according to government figures, the changes to conditionality for lone parents and

the main carer in couples will predominantly affect women (DWP 2015; 2012; 2011a). As such, it is important to explore the potential gendered implications of this policy. Before exploring gender concerns regarding the conditionality within Universal Credit, the next section reviews the previous literature relating to Universal Credit and gender.

3.3.3 Previous literature concerning Universal Credit and gender

The existing academic literature (Bennett and Sung, 2014, 2013a, 2013b; Bennett, 2012) concerning Universal Credit and gender mainly focuses on the gendered implications of the financial aspects of this new benefit. Concerns have been raised mainly in relation to coupled women and were initially evidenced using a previous qualitative research study investigating money management within couples (Sung and Bennett, 2007). Subsequently, research conducted by Griffiths et al. (2020) has been carried out which gives insight into how some of the gender concerns apply to coupled women claiming Universal Credit. The two primary issues initially raised were the implications of Universal Credit for women's access to income and their responsibility for managing money. Bennett and Sung have argued that Universal Credit may increase women's economic dependence on men by challenging both of women's main means of acquiring an independent income: wages and social security benefits. These authors have expressed concern about the weaker financial incentives women face under Universal Credit compared with the previous system. The government has explained that the potential for decreased work incentives for second earners is due to the focus in Universal Credit on reducing households in which no one undertakes paid work and has stated:

It is possible that in some families, second earners may be able to reduce or rebalance their hours or to leave work. In these cases, the improved ability of the main earner to support his or her family will increase options available for families to strike their preferred work/life balance (DWP, 2011d, pp.23–24).

However, Bennett and Sung view these decreased incentives for second earners as problematic due to the potential return to a male breadwinner model, which would result in women having less access to an independent income through wages. This

concern highlights a disparity within Universal Credit: lower income couples are subject to increasing expectations of paid work (which constitutes an attempt to further the adult worker model) whereas the system endorses the male breadwinner model for those with higher incomes (Judge, 2015a).

In addition, Bennett and Sung contend that the single payment into one account under Universal Credit may also reduce women's access to an independent income. Under previous benefits, elements for children were paid to the main carer of the children (usually the mother), thus giving women access to an independent benefit. This principle was fought for when Family Allowances were first introduced in 1946 and has been successfully defended repeatedly in subsequent years (Grover, 2016; Pateman, 1989). However, under Universal Credit the whole payment is made into one account (chosen by the couple). Previous research conducted by Sung and Bennett (2007) suggests paying Universal Credit into one account, even if it is a joint account, may result in unequal availability of the payments due to gendered power inequalities within couples. Consequently, Bennett and Sung have expressed concern that this policy change would limit women's access to the benefit (including the elements specifically for children):

when gender inequalities within the household are more likely to mean that men have financial control, and when gender inequalities outside the household mean that women are more likely to have no (or very little) other income, this arrangement could mean that in unequal couples the more powerful partner more likely to be the man ends up with virtually all the family's resources (2014, p.13).

In the study conducted by Griffiths et al. (2020), the majority of the payees were women; however, this did not render the single payment into one account unproblematic. For example, it undermined the financial management skills of the non-recipient and the risk of financial abuse remained.

Finally, Bennett and Sung have argued that the change to the single integrated monthly payment may have implications for women's responsibilities for household budgeting. Their previous research demonstrates that in low-income families,

women often have the primary responsibility for managing the household budget (Sung and Bennett, 2007). As such, Bennet and Sung contend that the single monthly payment may result in women bearing the costs (such as stress and poverty) of the budgeting difficulties caused by the less frequent amalgamated Universal Credit payment. Research conducted by Griffiths et al. (2020) found that coupled women do have disproportionate responsibility for managing the Universal Credit payment (in part because they are more likely to be the payee) which results in administrative and compliance burdens, and ultimately, stress. This is caused not only by the single integrated monthly payment but also by the volatility and inadequacy of payments. While there has been detailed analysis and research of the gendered financial aspects of Universal Credit policy, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the gendered implications of the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit. The next subsection discusses potential implications of the conditionality for lead carers that relate to women's citizenship status.

3.3.4 Conditionality for lead carers and women's citizenship

As previously discussed, conditionality may have implications for key issues in relation to women's citizenship including the valuing of unpaid care, women's position in the paid labour market and women's agency (see Chapter 2.4). This subsection explores gender concerns relating to the conditionality within Universal Credit and these key citizenship issues.

3.3.4.1 *Valuing unpaid care*

Concerns that conditionality devalues unpaid care have been raised specifically in relation to the conditionality within Universal Credit (Cain, 2016; Davies, 2015; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Deacon and Patrick, 2011). Particular elements of the Universal Credit conditionality regime may have implications for the valuing of unpaid care such as the threshold (the age of the youngest child) at which mandatory job search conditions apply to lead carers. When the Welfare Reform and Work Bill was introduced in 2015, objections were raised to proposals to subject lead carers with a youngest child aged three or four years old to job search requirements (CPAG, 2015a, 2015b; Gingerbread, 2015b; House of Lords Hansard, 2015a). These

objections were made on the grounds that parental care and contact in the early years are particularly critical, for example in terms of child development and outcomes in later life, and that unpaid care is important work. Limiting mothers' ability to engage in unpaid care before the youngest child enters mandatory education is a significant break with previous policy that may have implications for the valuing of unpaid care.

The extensiveness of the number of hours of required job-search and paid work within Universal Credit may also have implications for the valuing of unpaid care. This policy may limit the time and energy mothers have to carry out their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care which involves not only time spent with children but also domestic and administrative tasks. Conditionality for lead carers may also restrict involvement in the child's school. Brewer and Paul explain that "a child starting school brings a new involvement in school life for the parent as well as the child, potentially generating new responsibilities for mothers outside the formal labour market" (2006, p.10). The requirements for lead carers with a youngest child aged thirteen or above may be particularly problematic because the mandated job search hours and related expectations of full-time work exceed school hours. Consequently, the requirements of Universal Credit may run contrary to the care needs of teenagers: qualitative research has demonstrated that lone parents view that guiding, supervising and being available for teenage children is of great importance (Haux et al., 2012; Peacey, 2009). Therefore, the extensiveness of the job search requirements and expectations of paid work for lead carers may fail to recognise and value the importance of mothers' caring responsibilities.

The potential for conditionality to limit mothers' time and ability to undertake paid work is particularly concerning given that increased requirements of paid work have been implemented in the context of increasing government and cultural expectations of the mothering role (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016). For example, in recent decades, UK governments have stressed the importance of parents' roles in their children's education (Vincent, 2017; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016). Therefore, there are contradictions between the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit and wider governmental messages and policy regarding parents' responsibilities for their children (Cain, 2016; Rafferty and Wiggan, 2011). Research

demonstrates that lone parents can feel condemned as neglectful parents if they engage in paid work but are pejoratively labelled as welfare dependent if they receive benefits to care for their children themselves (Johnsen, 2016; Lynch and Lyons, 2009a).

The extent to which women's caring responsibilities are recognised and valued within Universal Credit policy may depend to a degree on the discretion exercised by work coaches. Lipsky (2010) highlights the importance of frontline workers in implementing welfare policy. He argues that while frontline workers are constrained by directives from higher authorities, occupational norms, and the rules and regulations of policy, they also have considerable discretion in administering social security benefits and therefore have the potential to greatly influence the delivery of government policy. Caswell et al. (2017), Nothdurfter (2016) and Fletcher (2011) argue that frontline workers are particularly important to the delivery and arising implications of conditionality policies. Frontline worker discretion may be particularly pertinent to the conditionality within Universal Credit given the emphasis on individualising conditionality to claimants' personal circumstances (DWP, 2011a, 2010c). Regarding lead carers, the government has stated, "We will ensure that any requirements imposed on a claimant are reasonable and take into account their caring responsibilities" (DWP, 2011a, p.7). As work coaches are responsible for tailoring work-related requirements to lead carers' caring responsibilities (DWP, 2015e), they have discretion in prescribing the required number of job search hours in addition to the expectations regarding claimants' availability for, and location of, paid work. They may also have increased discretion in referring lead carers for sanctions (which are ultimately decided by DWP staff members termed 'Decision Makers'), particularly given the downgrading of many of the lone parent flexibilities to guidance.

In short, key aspects of Universal Credit policy such as the threshold (age of the youngest child) at which responsible carers are required to look for paid work and the extensiveness of the mandated job-search hours may have significant implications for the valuing of unpaid care. Of particular importance, the conditionality within Universal Credit may reduce low-income mothers' ability to provide unpaid care as, due to the CET, the intensified and expanded conditionality

regime within Universal Credit is applied to mothers on the lowest incomes. Research is needed to investigate how mothers view and experience the conditionality within Universal Credit in relation to their roles as unpaid carers.

3.3.4.2 Women's position in the paid labour market

The conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit may also have implications for women's position in the paid labour market, another key issue relating to women's citizenship. The government has stated that due to the new conditionality regime, Universal Credit "presents an opportunity to promote equality in work and narrow the employment gap" (DWP, 2012c, p.42). However, concerns that conditionality exacerbates women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market have been raised specifically in relation to the conditionality within Universal Credit (MacLeavy, 2011). Charities have highlighted the problematic combination of women's predominance in low-paid, insecure work and the emphasis in Universal Credit on moving people into work at the first opportunity rather than focusing on helping claimants obtain high quality, sustainable work (Fawcett Society, 2015; Gingerbread, 2015b). Under Universal Credit, the government is explicitly trying to move claimants into any type of work, including temporary and part-time jobs they may not have previously considered (DWP, 2017b). This constitutes a 'work-first' approach entailing moving claimants into any type of work as quickly as possible and has been criticised for encouraging claimants into obtaining low-paid and inappropriate jobs (Lindsay, McQuaid and Dutton, 2007). This may be especially disadvantageous to mothers given their propensity to enter low-paid, insecure jobs (see Chapter 2.2.1) and research which has shown, contrary to government beliefs, that generally such jobs do not lead to higher paid work, particularly in the case of women (D'Arcy and Finch, 2017). Thus, rather than improving low-income women's disadvantaged labour market position, conditionality for lead carers may further hinder it by increasing through compulsion mothers' entrance into low-paid, insecure jobs with few opportunities for progression.

The conditionality within Universal Credit may also limit mothers' options for training and education with implications for women's labour market position. Quantitative modelling carried out by Dorsett, Lui and Weale (2011) found that opportunities for

adult training and education for those who ended their compulsory and further education some years earlier are important to women both in terms of their ability to obtain paid work and the level of their earnings. Education and training can be particularly important for mothers who have had a period of time outside of the paid labour market on account of their caring responsibilities (Grant, 2009). However, prior evidence suggests that conditionality limits mothers' opportunities for education and training (Johnsen, 2016; Ingold and Etherington, 2013; Haux et al., 2012). Under Universal Credit lead carers are able to spend some time each week in training (at the discretion of their work coach). However, due to the job search and availability requirements, should a mother be offered a job, she may have to discontinue training to take up the job to avoid a sanction. In addition, as the work-preparation only requirement is applicable for a very limited time (when the youngest child is aged two) and job search requirements start from when the youngest child is aged three, mothers returning to work may have little time to engage in training before they are expected to be available for, and look for, paid work. This may have implications for both the types of jobs they obtain and their long-term career prospects and earnings.

Additionally, the increased childcare provision introduced alongside and under Universal Credit may be insufficient to facilitate women's sustained participation in paid work. Charities have welcomed the extra childcare provision but also have concerns about the scope and delivery of this provision (CPAG, 2015a; Gingerbread, 2015a). For example, the extension from fifteen to thirty hours per week of formal childcare provision is only available for thirty-eight weeks of the year (or the equivalent number of hours) and only those who undertake at least sixteen hours of work paid at the minimum wage are eligible to receive it. As such, it is not available for those who are undertaking mandatory job searching nor those undertaking training (Treasury Committee, 2018; CPAG, 2015a). In addition, lone parents undertaking low paid jobs or zero-hour contracts may not be eligible due to the earnings requirements (Dewar and Ben-Galim, 2017). A further concern is that the government may struggle to meet promised provision (CPAG, 2015b). Regarding the government's policy within Universal Credit to pay eighty-five percent of childcare costs, concerns have been raised that the requirement to pay the first month of childcare provision up front (and then claim a proportion back) will be challenging for

those on low incomes (Judge, 2015a). If issues surrounding childcare provision (which limit mothers' engagement in paid work) have not been adequately addressed, Universal Credit may fail to effectively facilitate women's participation in the paid labour market.

The extent to which Universal Credit helps facilitate women's participation in the paid labour market may depend largely on the support claimants receive from their work coaches. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of support provided by Jobcentre Plus (JCP) staff in helping benefit claimants obtain paid work (Patrick, 2017; Dwyer and Bright, 2016). Such support may be especially important to mothers given their specific challenges in engaging with paid work caused in part by their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care. Those who have had time away from the paid labour market on account of their caring responsibilities may have experienced a loss of confidence and paid work experience, and an erosion of skills and qualifications (Grant, 2009) and may be in particular need of support in obtaining paid work. Of concern, since 2011 there has been a phasing out of lone parent advisers (introduced by the New Labour government of 1997-2010 to provide specialist support to lone parents) at the JCP (Fawcett Society, 2015; Gingerbread, 2013).

Overall, welfare reform based on sanctions rather than support may not be an appropriate policy response given the challenges mothers face in entering and sustaining paid work (Davies, 2015). The concerns raised above are pertinent to mothers on the lowest incomes given that conditionality is applied to claimants earning under a specified level. This may be particularly problematic given such mothers already face considerable structural inequalities in the current paid labour market and have limited opportunities for obtaining secure, well-paid jobs (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016). Research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit in moving mothers into sustainable paid work and to explore the types of jobs they obtain.

3.3.4.3 Women's agency

Claims that conditionality has the potential to deny mothers the choice to undertake unpaid care and to restrict their agency in regard to decisions about their engagement in the paid labour market have also been levelled specifically at the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit (Millar, 2019; Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Davies, 2015, 2012; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013). Of chief concern, mothers' agency may be constrained by both the obligation to job search from when the youngest child is aged three and the mandated hours of required job search. Charities have criticised the lowering of the threshold for job search to when the youngest child is aged three on the grounds this denies parents choice regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work in the crucial early years of their children's development (CPAG, 2015b; Gingerbread, 2015b). Regarding older children, it has been argued that parents are best placed to know the appropriate level of engagement in unpaid care and paid work and, as such, they should be able to determine this for themselves (Judge, 2015a).

The application of in-work conditionality to lone parents has been criticised on similar grounds. There are concerns that in-work conditionality may result in mandatory expectations of paid work hours that conflict with parental choices regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017). Research has found that lone parents resent in-work conditionality as they feel they have already carefully reconciled their engagement in paid work with their caring responsibilities (BritainThinks, 2018). They do not deem it appropriate to spend more time away from their children nor perceive they can afford further childcare costs to cover the additional paid work hours required. Criticisms of in-work conditionality are particularly salient given the precarious nature of the lower end of the current paid labour market and the difficulty mothers may have in increasing their paid work hours or rate of pay, or obtaining a second job. For example, Rafferty and Wiggan (2017) found that underemployment is widespread among lone parents. They argue that the lack of additional hours or higher earnings which lone parents can access may make it difficult for lone parents to meet demands to increase their earnings. In addition, the application of in-work conditionality to low-income parents may be particularly problematic given the low returns they accrue under Universal

Credit when undertaking paid work beyond sixteen hours a week. As such, in-work conditionality may compel mothers to work for little financial return (Kowalewska, 2015). It may not be appropriate to compel mothers to work for low financial gain when they would prefer to spend more time with their children (CPAG, 2016).

Other stipulations and aspects of Universal Credit may also run contrary to mothers' choices regarding unpaid care and paid work. As the Claimant Commitment stipulates the type of work claimants are mandated to seek and the geographical location of job search, there is further potential for conditionality for lead carers to constrain mothers' agency in relation to their decisions about paid work. In addition, under Universal Credit work coaches can direct claimants to apply for specific jobs with the potential for sanctions as a consequence of non-compliance (DWP, 2018a). These stipulations and directives may also reduce women's agency in undertaking paid work that is appropriate to them and their caring responsibilities. This also highlights that the role work coaches play may be an important factor in the extent to which women's agency is impacted due to work coaches' ability to exercise discretion in regard to setting and enforcing work-related requirements and issuing directives.

To date, there is little evidence illuminating how mothers respond to the compulsion within conditionality for lead carers. Research conducted by NatCen for the DWP shows that some parents resent the work-related requirements of Universal Credit due to a desire to carry out unpaid care and as such engage in compliance-based behaviour (DWP, 2017b). This suggests that the compulsion within Universal Credit may result in some mothers complying with work-related requirements to avoid a sanction but not in a productive way. This research also demonstrates that personal factors (such as desire to carry out unpaid care and aversion to formal childcare provision) can result in non-participation in the paid labour market despite the components of Universal Credit (such as conditionality) intended to cause behaviour change.

The potential for the compulsion within Universal Credit to limit women's agency in regard to engagement in unpaid care and paid work is particularly concerning given that, due to the CET, conditionality is applied to those on the lowest incomes. As

Lakhani (2012) points out, higher earners in receipt of Universal Credit have options to engage in training and unpaid care whereas those with earnings below the conditionality threshold do not have these options. Similarly, in-work conditionality has been objected to on the grounds that higher earners have to work fewer hours than the lowest paid to be exempt from in-work conditionality (Judge, 2015b). Further investigation is needed to determine the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's agency and the way they respond to the compulsion within the policy.

This section has demonstrated that the introduction of Universal Credit has expanded and intensified conditionality for both lone and coupled mothers. The new conditionality regime within Universal Credit for lead carers may have implications for women's citizenship as there are gender concerns pertaining to the valuing of unpaid care, women's position in the paid labour market and women's agency. Such concerns warrant investigation, particularly given the historical and continuing devaluation of unpaid care, women's ongoing weaker labour market position and also the myriad of constraints that are already placed on women's agency in relation to their engagement in paid work and unpaid care (see Chapter 2.2). Additionally, the academic research and literature to date concerning Universal Credit and gender mainly focuses on the financial elements of this new benefit (Griffiths et al., 2020; Bennett and Sung, 2014, 2013a, 2013b; Bennett, 2012) and there is a lack of empirical research concerning the potential gendered implications of conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that due to the contested underlying assumptions and aims of Universal Credit and the questionable design and delivery, Universal Credit may not achieve its intended outcomes and early evidence shows that it can adversely impact claimants. The introduction of Universal Credit is intended to reorient the benefits system around paid work and one key means of achieving this—the intensification and expansion of conditionality—may have particular implications for women. Universal Credit introduces a new conditionality regime for main carers of children which intensifies conditionality for lone mothers and extends job search

requirements to coupled mothers for the first time. Due to their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, women are more likely to be subject to the new conditionality regime for main carers of children.

Concerns have been raised that the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit may devalue unpaid care, exacerbate women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market and limit women's agency. As Universal Credit is a means-tested benefit, any gendered implications of conditionality for lead carers will be particularly felt by low-income women. This is compounded by the conditionality thresholds: those who are unemployed and on the lowest incomes are subject to the strictest conditionality regime. Lone mothers may particularly be subject to conditionality given that coupled mothers can be exempt (or subject to less stringent requirements) if their partner's earnings are above a particular level. However, coupled mothers may face financial loss due to the actions of their partner because if one partner receives a sanction, the whole family is likely to be impacted as there is one monthly payment into one account (Millar and Bennett, 2017). There is a need to investigate the potential gendered implications of the conditionality for main carers of children within Universal Credit. The next chapter outlines the fieldwork designed to explore whether the gender concerns raised in the literature are realised in the lives of coupled and lone mothers subject to the conditionality regime for lead carers.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides an account of the methodology used to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1.4 and thereby address the gap in the research concerning the conditionality within Universal Credit and its potential implications for women's citizenship. Section 4.2 outlines the theoretical orientation of the study, specifically the social constructionist and interpretivist underpinnings, the use of abductive reasoning and the influence of feminist principles. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 discuss the qualitative methodology and the longitudinal design respectively. Section 4.5 details the research process including methods of recruitment, data collection, analysis and dissemination. Ethical issues and research quality are raised within these sections and are also discussed in more detail in Sections 4.6 and 4.7.⁴

4.2. Theoretical orientation

This research was informed by the ontology of social constructionism and the epistemology of interpretivism. Under social constructionism, knowledge is perceived to be formed collectively through everyday interactions and experiences (Blaikie, 2007; Burr, 2003; Schwandt, 2000). Consequently, social knowledge varies across time, location and culture and therefore is not innate or objective (Lock and Strong, 2010; Blaikie, 2007; Burr, 2003). As there are multiple realities that have been constructed by different societal groups, there are multiple views and interpretations of any phenomenon (Yilmaz, 2013). Therefore, under social constructionism, social research requires obtaining the perspectives of the people affected by the phenomenon (Yilmaz, 2013) and such accounts are considered central to the research (Blaikie, 2007; Burr, 2003). The corresponding epistemology

⁴ On occasion the first person singular has been used in this chapter. This is to improve the clarity of the discussion and corresponds with the qualitative methodology and feminist underpinnings of the research which emphasise acknowledging the influence of the researcher on the research process rather than striving for objectivity (Letherby, 2003; Webb, 1992).

of interpretivism holds that the role of the social researcher is to understand and portray the social world as interpreted and experienced by its members (Blaikie, 2007, 2000). It considers that research participants have already interpreted the social world and the researcher must strive to understand what the social situation under study means to them (Blaikie, 2007; Yanow, 2006). This entails trying to gain an empathetic understanding (*Verstehen*) of the experiences of participants (Schwandt, 1998) and the aim is to obtain and describe the participants' points of view (Yanow, 2006; Blaikie, 2000).

Social constructionism and interpretivism are consistent with the abductive research strategy (Blaikie, 2007, 2000; Mason, 2002) used to develop theory in research. This research strategy entails generating social scientific theories from the research participants' accounts of social life (Blaikie, 2000). Therefore, this strategy results in social theory that is based upon the experiences and views of the social actors under study. The process of abductive reasoning entails starting with the research participants' accounts of the social world, and particularly the knowledge they have of the subject matter under investigation, and using these to form social scientific accounts (Blaikie, 2000). From these accounts, theory is developed that provides understanding of the lives of the research participants (Blaikie, 2007, 2000).

As this study emphasised women's lived experiences, it also adhered to the central epistemological tenet of feminist research: legitimising women's experiences as sources of knowledge (Campbell and Wasco, 2000; Maynard, 1994). Historically, women and their concerns have been sidelined and distorted within social science research (Stanley and Wise, 2002). Therefore, feminist research aims to understand and portray accounts from women as this enables researchers to explore their social world and how it differs from that of men as well as to expose the ways in which women are oppressed (Letherby, 2003; Stanley and Wise, 2002; Maynard, 1994). As McIntosh and Wright explain,

feminist phenomenology demonstrates how 'lived experience' can be used as a lens to understand and express gendered and embodied subjectivities. Perhaps most usefully for social policy, this speaks to the political strategy of recognition: giving voice and making the invisible visible as a response to subordination (2019, p.19).

Foregrounding women's views and experiences and making them visible was particularly important to this study which sought to investigate potential implications of the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit for women's citizenship. Additionally, in line with feminist methodologies, this research entailed careful consideration of ethical issues and also involved a commitment to reflexivity (Campbell and Wasco, 2000; Maynard, 1994). While taking a broadly feminist approach to the research, care was also taken to ensure other significant differences between women (such as social class) which may also impact women's experiences and views were not marginalised (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002).

These theoretical orientations and strategies that highly value the accounts of research participants were appropriate to the study of the conditionality within Universal Credit given there are contested assumptions underpinning the implementation of conditionality concerning the behaviour and motivation of social security benefits recipients (see Chapter 2.3). Similarly, it was appropriate given there are claims that there is a mismatch between the assumptions underpinning the design of Universal Credit and everyday experiences of life on a low income (Millar and Bennett, 2017). Foregrounding claimants' experiences of, and views on, Universal Credit provided the opportunity to understand what the reform meant to those in receipt of this new benefit and therefore inform policy assumptions, design and delivery. In addition, an ontology that acknowledges the social constructed and contextualised nature of knowledge and the plurality of realities was particularly salient to the study of the conditionality within Universal Credit for lead carers given the variety of perspectives within society on citizenship rights, roles and responsibilities, and what it means to be a 'good mother'.

4.3. Qualitative research design

The empirical research employed a qualitative methodology. This approach is chiefly concerned with understanding the social world from the point of view of the people being studied (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman and Burgess, 1999). In undertaking qualitative inquiry, researchers aim to understand how the subject matter is experienced and given meaning by the study's participants (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Mason, 2002). Consequently, it was an appropriate methodology for generating data to meet the overarching research aim (see Chapter 1.4). As qualitative inquiry has the capacity for producing detailed, rich and complex data which reflects the realities of everyday life (Mason, 2002; Blaikie, 2000; Gubrium and Holstein, 1999), it was useful for providing in-depth and nuanced accounts of the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit. This approach also seeks to acquire an awareness of the social context in which the data are produced (Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Mason, 2002), which helped in obtaining a more informed understanding and interpretation of the participants' views and experiences.

A qualitative approach is also particularly useful for analysing new policies. As Rist explains, qualitative research is an advantageous approach for investigating the implementation of a new policy as it can focus on "the day-to-day realities of bringing a new program or policy into existence" (2000, p.1008). This includes obtaining insight into how frontline workers understand, respond to and deliver new policies. Consequently, it was an appropriate methodology for investigating the realities of the implementation of Universal Credit, and particularly the role of frontline workers, which had a significant influence on how the participants were impacted by the conditionality for lead carers (see Chapters 5.3, 6.5, 7.3 and 7.4). Rist (2000) also argues that qualitative research has the capacity to explore intended and unintended outcomes arising from the implementation of a new policy. As such, qualitative research was a useful methodology for exploring whether the participants entered and progressed in paid work, and whether there were any gendered impacts of the policy.

4.4. Qualitative longitudinal research

The qualitative research design adopted a longitudinal approach. The study involved conducting two waves of semi-structured interviews with a sample of mothers who were subject to the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit. The interval between the two interviews ranged from six to ten months depending on the participants' circumstances and availability. This was considered an appropriate interval between the two waves as the government expects rapid change in behaviour and employment outcomes. For example, the Universal Credit performance framework, used for assessing the labour market impact of Universal Credit, looks at four outcomes including 'Don't want to leave people behind' (DWP, 2018e). This outcome measures the number of Universal Credit claimants who reach the six month point of their claim without having any earnings. This suggests that the government anticipates claimants will typically enter paid work within six months of claiming Universal Credit.

Qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) entails qualitative enquiry conducted through time (Neale, 2012) and typically involves making repeat and comparative observations of participants' actions and views (Saldaña, 2003; Smith, 2003). QLR is primarily concerned with analysing change (Neale, 2015; Corden and Millar, 2007) and consequently is particularly useful for discerning how people experience, manage and respond to change, and how change impacts upon people's lives (Neale, 2015; Neale and Flowerdew, 2003). Given that the implementation of conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit represents a significant policy change and the empirical research was concerned with investigating the impacts of this policy, QLR was an appropriate research design to employ. In addition to giving insight into what change occurs and why, QLR is helpful for uncovering the absence of change, which may be significant (Lewis, 2007; Saldaña, 2003). Consequently, QLR was helpful in exploring instances in which participants did not experience change as a result of the implementation of conditionality for lead carers (see, for example, Chapter 6.7).

This research strategy was also appropriate given the aim within Universal Credit to change claimants' behaviours and attitudes towards paid work. Corden and Millar

explain, “This focus on change [within QLR], both on 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” (2007, p.529). QLR is useful for giving insight into whether, how and why behaviour change occurs (Corden and Nice, 2007; Thomson, 2007). Therefore, it was useful for observing the salience of the Theory of Change within Universal Credit (see Chapter 3.2.2) and specifically whether the conditionality for lead carers changed attitudes and behaviours towards paid work, and ultimately, employment trajectories (see Chapters 6.7, 7.2 and 7.6).

A further purpose of QLR is to obtain more detailed insight into participants’ experiences (Saldaña, 2003). By conducting repeat waves of qualitative data collection, a richer and more nuanced understanding of participants’ accounts can be obtained (Miller, 2015; Neale, 2015; Thomson, 2007). This is particularly pertinent in the study of welfare services, as people’s experiences of, and responses to, such services develop over time as people have multiple interactions with services and experience the consequences of earlier interactions (Lewis, 2007). The two waves of interviews conducted for this study generated data which provided a fuller account of the ways in which the conditionality within Universal Credit impacted upon the mothers’ caring responsibilities, employment trajectories and agency. For example, the experiences of the mothers who were self-employed changed over time as at the first wave of interviews many of these mothers were in the one year start-up period but at the second wave they were subject to the MIF and therefore the research helpfully captured these different experiences of the policy (see Chapter 6.6).

While QLR is a very effective method for exploring the impacts of policy change (Millar, 2020) and has the capacity to generate rich data, it also presents various challenges. These include the need to retain the sample and to undertake more complex data management and analysis. It also entails greater consideration of ethical issues as QLR heightens these (Neale and Hanna, 2012). Despite these challenges and the constraints of the timeframe of the PhD, QLR was employed due to the usefulness of this approach in providing data that gives detailed and insightful answers to the research questions. The ways in which the challenges of QLR were addressed are explained in the proceeding sections.

4.5 The research process

The first stage in the research process was to conduct a detailed review of the literature and policy to explore relevant theories, arguments and research related to the conditionality within Universal Credit and also to demonstrate the issues that needed to be addressed (Hart, 2018). Conducting the literature review involved systematic searches in key academic databases (chiefly Scopus and Web of Science) of terms relevant to the study such as 'conditionality', 'women's citizenship' and 'Universal Credit'. A search was also made of the government literature to obtain a thorough understanding of Universal Credit policy. This body of literature included responses to government consultations from charities and non-government organisations and therefore served as a platform for exploring the grey literature. The second stage in the research process was to collect the data to explore the research questions. The steps in this stage are described below.

4.5.1. Recruitment and sampling

The location of the study was Yorkshire, England and the majority of the participants were recruited from the city of York. Universal Credit was fully rolled out in York in July 2017 and therefore the city had a sufficient number of claimants to recruit from when the fieldwork started in September 2018. Locating the study in this city provided a contrast with other studies investigating similar themes (for example, Patrick, 2017; Graham and McQuaid, 2014) as the city has a lower unemployment rate than the national average. From April 2018-March 2019, which encompassed the first wave of the study's interviews, the unemployment rate in York was 3 percent whereas the national average was 4.1 percent (Office for National Statistics, 2019c). Therefore this study provides insight into how conditionality affects mothers in an area where there are ostensibly greater job opportunities. However, while York has a low unemployment rate, it also has significant inequalities. For example, while it has a number of high value sectors such as bioscience and financial services which pay high wages, it also has a skew towards sectors (such as tourism, retail and care) which pay low wages and offer limited opportunities for progression (City of York Council, 2016). There are also big differences in child poverty rates and life expectancy between the city's wards (York Human Rights, 2018). In addition, it is

regarded as an unaffordable place to live due to the high housing costs (Walker, 2018). Consequently, the economic context of York is more complex than may initially appear.

Perhaps owing in part to the study location, and also the recruitment strategies (discussed below), the educational qualifications of some of the participants were higher than expected and a good proportion of the participants were middle class.⁵ Therefore, there was a disadvantage in recruiting the participants from the study location as the study captured in disproportionately low numbers the experiences and views of mothers most likely to be affected by the Universal Credit conditionality regime. However, it was advantageous to have a sample that was diverse in terms of social class as this is important for investigating change, as Gerson and Horowitz explain,

it is...important to interview people who vary in their social resources and in their responses to change...the challenge is to choose a sample that can expose how different social locations (such as gender, race, and class position) pose different dilemmas, offer unequal resources, and create divergent options (2002, p.205).

The differences in class within the sample allowed comparisons in experiences of, and views on, the conditionality with Universal Credit to be made across class and educational lines and the findings show not only differences in how this policy is experienced and viewed but also gendered impacts that arise regardless of class.

To select participants with experiences of, and views on, the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit, a purposive sampling strategy was used. In line with the research aim, this strategy is useful for obtaining in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences (Neale, 2019; Devers and Frankel, 2000). As the emphasis in this strategy is on obtaining detailed insight into the subject matter under study, purposive sampling entails selecting participants who can provide relevant accounts

⁵ The social class of the participants was determined through the biographical information obtained at the interviews (such as qualification level and parents' occupations) and subjective indicators such as accent and dress.

of the research topic rather than on obtaining a representative sample from which statistical generalisations can be made (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2007; Patton, 2002). The following primary sampling criteria was used to select participants with relevant accounts of the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit: to take part in the study, the participants had to be mothers (lone or in a couple) in receipt of Universal Credit who were subject to either work preparation or job search requirements. Of secondary importance, I also attempted to recruit mothers with children of varying ages so that the experiences of, and views on, the different intensities of work-related requirements (see Chapter 3.3.3) could be explored. This was partially successful. Four or more mothers with children aged two years, three or four years, and five to twelve years took part in the study; however, only one mother who had a child aged over twelve years was recruited. This mother had an a reduction in work-related requirements on the grounds of ill health and therefore the sample lacked participants subject to the most intensive job search requirements. I had initially hoped to recruit approximately equal numbers of lone and coupled mothers; however, the sample mainly comprised lone mothers. This may have been due to the potential for coupled mothers to be exempt from conditionality requirements on the basis of their partners' earnings (see Chapter 3.3.2). While only three of the mothers had a joint claim for Universal Credit at the first wave of interviews, a further three of the mothers had previous experiences of a joint claim and one mother had experience of a joint claim between the two waves of interviews. Therefore seven accounts of the joint claim were obtained. The sampling strategy was successful in obtaining mothers of a variety of ages and nationalities and who had differing numbers of children (given claims for Universal Credit by families with more than two children could only be made after February 2019), characteristics which in some cases were salient to the mothers' experiences of, and views on, the conditionality within Universal Credit. The sampling criteria did not specify the length of time the participants had been in receipt of Universal Credit. As the participants had been claiming Universal Credit for varying lengths of time, the study used the initial Universal Credit claim as the baseline for the research (Neale, 2019) because this is the point at which the Claimant Commitment is formed (see Chapter 3.3.2).

The participants were recruited through a variety of means and an information leaflet (see Appendix B) was used to aid the recruitment process. Initial strategies included

recruiting participants through gatekeepers (for example, at housing associations, a homeless hostel and organisations that help get people into paid work), placing an advert on a local website for mums and visiting community centres. I also recruited mothers in receipt of Universal Credit that I already knew and on occasion friends and participants referred potential participants to me. After approximately four months, I had recruited fifteen participants to the study. As I wanted a larger sample, I set up a Facebook account for the purposes of the study and used this to recruit participants. I mainly posted information about the study on community centre pages (with the hosts' permission) which proved to be particularly effective. Overall, seven participants were recruited through Facebook, six through gatekeepers, two through the website for mums, two through snowballing, two through friends, one through a community centre and four were mothers I already knew. There are implications of the recruitment methods used. Of chief importance, the methods mainly involved self-selection and therefore it is possible that those with greater confidence levels took part as in many cases participating in the research required the mothers to put themselves forward and get in touch with me directly. This raises questions as to how those with less confidence and who are seldom heard experience and view the conditionality within Universal Credit. There were also particular implications of recruiting participants through Facebook. This has the potential to exclude potential participants who do not have the devices or data to use Facebook, those who have difficulty in using technology and those who do not use this social media platform. Recruiting participants through Facebook also raises ethical issues. For example, there is the potential to compromise the anonymity of the participants. In this study, the tightest privacy settings, which still allowed for information about the study to be shared, were used. The use of Facebook also has implications for the relationship between the research and the participants as this is a forum often used for contacting friends. In this study, the researcher-participant relationship was already more complex due to the longitudinal element of the study (Neale, 2012; Patrick, 2012a). In an attempt to maintain a professional relationship, as mentioned above, the Facebook account used was set up specifically for the purposes of this study, and only posts relevant to the study were made.

The resultant sample comprised twenty-four mothers. This sample size was chosen for its capacity to provide a range of experiences and views without compromising

the depth of the data, and also to allow for some attrition during the two waves of interviews. It was particularly important to have a manageable sample size given the research was conducted longitudinally and therefore produced a substantial amount of data to be analysed (Neale, 2019). Table 4 on the next page summarises the characteristics across the sample while Table 5 gives detailed information relevant to each participant's Universal Credit claim. Both tables refer to the information obtained at the first wave of interviews.

Table 4 Biographical information across the sample

Characteristic	Number of mothers
Age of the mother:	
Twenties	6
Thirties	13
Forties	5
Education:	
No qualifications	1
GCSEs	5
College/A-levels	8
University	7
Ethnicity:	
White British	18
Asian British	1
Black Other	1
White Other	4
Number of children:	
One	8
Two	14
Three	2
Age of the youngest child:	
Two	4
Three or four	4
Five to twelve	15
Thirteen or older	1

Table 5 Participants' Universal Credit claim information

Participant number	Reason for initial Universal Credit claim	Duration on Universal Credit	Joint or single claim	Age of youngest child	Work related requirements	Work status
1	Relationship breakdown	3 months	Single	6 years	25 hours/week working on business	Self-employed
2	Relationship breakdown	2 months	Single	6 years	25 hours/week working on business	Self-employed
3	Relationship breakdown	15 months	Single	3 years	16 hours/week working on business	Self-employed
4	Moved house	12 months	Single	2 years	Work focused interviews	Unemployed
5	Relationship breakdown	14 months	Single	2 years	Work focused interviews	Intermittent employment
6	Relationship formation	15 months	Single (initially joint)	5 years	In-work conditionality (5 hours job-search)	Employed 20 hours/week
7	Moved house	10 months	Joint	5 years	25 hours/week job-search	Unemployed
8	Relationship breakdown	11 months	Single	10 years	6 hours/week job-search	Unemployed
9	Relationship breakdown	4 months	Single	2 years	Work focused interviews	Unemployed
10	Redundancy	11 months	Single	10 years	6 hours/week job-search	Unemployed
11	Savings dropped below £16 000	8 months	Single	4 years	16 hours/week working on business	Self-employed
12	Advised to claim by housing association	3 months	Joint	6 years	In-work conditionality (light touch)/unspecified job-search	Self-employed (intermittently)

13	Moved house	12 months	Single	5 years	25 hours/week job-search	Unemployed
14	Relationship breakdown	20 months	Single	8 years	In-work conditionality (light touch)	Zero-hours contract and self-employed (two jobs)
15	Relationship breakdown	6 months	Single	9 years	16 hours/week working on business	Self-employed, part-time student
16	Moved house	12 months	Single	4 years	17 hours/week job preparation	Unemployed
17	Redundancy	18 months	Single	4 years	Generic requirement to increase earnings (previously 30 hours a week job-search)	Employed (17 hours/week)
18	Youngest child turned five	18 months	Single	6 years	25 hours job-search during the university summer holidays	Full-time student
19	Relationship formation	6 months	Single (initially joint)	7 years	25 hours/week working on business	Self-employed
20	Relationship re-formation	7 months	Joint	2 years	Indeterminate job-search hours	Unemployed
21	Declared fit for work (previously claiming ESA)	10 months	Single	14 years	10 hours/week job-search	Unemployed
22	Youngest child turned five	4 months	Single	5 years	20 hours/week job-search	Unemployed
23	Relationship formation	12 months	Single (initially joint)	6 years	25 hours/week job-search	Unemployed
24	Reduction in WTCs (voluntary claim)	2 months	Single	5 years	In-work conditionality (9 hours job-search)	Employed (16 hours/week)

4.5.2 Conducting semi-structured interviews

The specific method used to obtain the data necessary to consider the research questions was individual face-to-face semi-structured qualitative interviews.

Qualitative interviews entail informal dialogue wherein the interviewer asks questions for a particular purpose (Mason, 2002; Gillham, 2000). In line with the research aim, they are useful for obtaining in-depth data concerning the interviewees' experiences and perspectives (Neale, 2019; Mason, 2002) and also correspond to the theoretical underpinnings of the study, as the accounts of the participants are central to this method (Mason, 2002). Additionally, qualitative interviews are useful for exploring change, a key focus of this study, as they provide the detailed and complex data to explore how external change is experienced, interpreted and responded to (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002; Mason, 2002).

For the first wave of interviews, the same semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix C) was used. The use of an interview guide helped to ensure that issues relevant to the research questions were covered yet also allowed for flexibility in exploring issues pertaining specifically to each participant (Arthur et al., 2014; Gillham, 2005). The interview guide was piloted first to refine it and ensure it was effective at investigating the areas under study (Gillham, 2005; van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2002). The first interview guide took the form of open questions and prompts and covered background information, experiences of claiming Universal Credit, the effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit on the participants' employment prospects, caring responsibilities and agency, the participants' views on the conditionality within Universal Credit, and biographical information. The second interview guide (see Appendix D) was informed by the data collected in the first wave of interviews. It covered the three main areas relevant to the study of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's citizenship (caring responsibilities, employment and agency); however, this guide was tailored to each participant. To achieve this, I listened to each audio recording and read the corresponding transcript before adapting the question guide so that it followed up on the issues relevant to each participant. I also included a summary of the participant's circumstances at the beginning of each interview (to help the participant answer questions regarding change) and some biographical questions at the end (to obtain information I realised

would be helpful after analysing the first wave of interviews). The longitudinal aspect of the research was considered during the construction of both interview guides. In the first interview guide I included a question about the participants' hopes and expectations for the coming months and in the second guide there were questions that investigated how events had unfolded, particularly in relation to paid work, so that comparisons between the two sets of answers could be made (Neale, 2019). Also, during the second wave of interviews I asked the participants whether their views had changed since the first wave of interviews.

Before each interview, I asked the participants for permission to audio-record the interview to ensure I had a full and accurate account (Arthur et al., 2014; Tessier, 2012). This also enabled me to capture the participant's tone and audible gestures, and enabled me to focus more fully on the interview (Arthur et al., 2014). One participant did not want to be recorded, so during both interviews I took detailed notes. Therefore, this participant is not quoted in the findings chapters; however, her experiences and views are represented. For all of the interviews I wrote field notes soon afterwards which detailed contextual data, initial impressions of salient points, reflections on how the interview had gone and ideas for the subsequent interview (Arthur et al., 2014; Tessier, 2012). These notes were helpful both in preparing for the second wave of interviews and in conducting the data analysis.

The venue for the interviews was at the choice of the participants (Yeo et al., 2014). Most of the interviews took place in the participants' homes. This was advantageous as it provided me with additional contextual data and resulted in a more quiet, relaxed and confidential environment. Five of the participants opted to meet at a library or a cafe and in these situations care was taken to ensure the conversations were kept confidential, which involved sitting in quieter areas of the venues. The first wave of interviews took place between September 2018 and March 2019 and the second wave took place between June 2019 and November 2019. The interviews ranged in duration from 24 to 124 minutes and lasted on average around 58 minutes.

4.5.3. Retaining the sample

Conducting longitudinal research relies on being able to maintain a sample over time (Neale, 2019). This poses a key challenge of QLR as this research approach typically involves modest sample sizes and therefore the loss of a relatively small number of participants can greatly impact the findings (Neale, 2019; Patrick, 2012a). Maintaining the sample can be particularly difficult when conducting research with marginalised groups (Neale, 2019). While some of the participants of this study were not marginalised, the circumstances of some of the other participants resulted in increased difficulty in sustaining the sample. Two of the participants were living in temporary accommodation during the first wave of interviews which exacerbated the difficulties of conducting a second interview as they had moved out of the temporary accommodation, and in one case away from the study location. Four of the participants had fled from their communities after experiencing domestic abuse. As a result, they were not very established in the study location and a couple of these mothers had very little in the way of social networks to draw upon as 'link people' (explained below). Six of the participants were experiencing both illness and considerable financial difficulties which may have made repeated participation in the study difficult for some of these mothers. While maintaining the sample is of great importance in conducting QLR, attempts to do so cannot compromise the voluntary consent of the participants. Therefore, it was made clear to participants that they could withdraw from the research at any point and that they were not obliged to participate in the second interview (Neale and Hanna, 2012; Patrick, 2012a). Also, there were limits to how far I pursued participation in the second interview (Neale, 2019). To aid with ensuring participants were not re-contacted an excessive number of times, a record was kept of attempts to re-contact participants and also the outcomes of these attempts (Miller, 2015).

Several strategies were adopted to maintain the sample. On initially recruiting the participants, I explained that the research involved two waves of interviews which may have reduced attrition as the participants knew of the longitudinal nature of the study when they chose to take part in it (Neale, 2019). When recruiting participants I also over-sampled so that if attrition did occur, I would have an adequate sample size for the second wave of interviews (Neale, 2019; Saldaña, 2003). At the

beginning of each interview, I asked participants if they agreed for me to contact them again, if necessary through a named person ('link person'), to ask if they wanted to participate in a second interview. For the participants recruited through gatekeepers, the link person was the relevant gatekeeper. Most of the other participants chose a family member or friend as their link person. Two participants had recently moved to the area and did not give a link person. Having a link person for each participant (where possible) was helpful in instances when I was unable to contact the participants through their own contact details. For example, after trying unsuccessfully to phone one of the participants, I got in touch with her link person who told me the participant's mobile phone number had changed and gave me her new number and as a result I was able to get in contact with her. Between the two waves of interviews I sent Christmas cards to the participants I had interviewed before Christmas 2018. I also sent summaries of the first wave of interviews to all but one participant (who did not want to receive one) along with a notecard reiterating when the next wave of interviews would be and explaining that I would get in touch nearer the time to ask the participants if they wanted to take part in a second interview. I sent a brief email to the participant who had not opted to receive a summary to convey the same message given in the notecards.

On re-contacting the participants, I was able to get in touch with all but one participant. I contacted this participant's link person who told me the participant had suddenly moved from the study location and had cut off contact with everyone from it. The other twenty-three participants agreed to be interviewed again. However, three participants asked to re-arrange the planned interviews and did not respond to subsequent phone calls and texts. Therefore, twenty participants were interviewed a second time. There are implications for the data concerning which participants continued with the study (Corden and Nice, 2007) and it is important to identify which participants did not take part in the second wave of interviews. In this study, three of those who did not take part in a second interview were facing some of the most significant challenges. One had experienced domestic abuse and was living in temporary accommodation, another had little support as she had been in care and also had considerable financial difficulties and the third had considerable health and financial difficulties. The other participant was due to give birth shortly and was experiencing complications with her pregnancy. All of the data was analysed,

regardless of whether the participants took part in a second interview (Corden and Nice, 2007).

4.5.4. Employing thematic data analysis

The longitudinal nature of the study also posed a challenge to the analysis due to the volume of data produced and the need to undertake repeated and extensive analysis; yet it was also a rewarding process on account of the opportunities to gain insight into how the mothers' experiences and views unfolded over time (Neale, 2019). The data generated in this study needed to be analysed both cross-sectionally and longitudinally (Thomson and Holland, 2003). Thematic analysis is typically used in QLR (Neale, 2019) and was carried out in this study. Thematic analysis is a systematic and transparent method of data analysis that entails identifying, organising and explaining patterns of meaning (themes) within a data set that are relevant to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Joffe, 2012). As this analytical strategy is useful for illuminating participant's experiences and views (Joffe, 2012; Attride-Stirling, 2001), it was a particularly appropriate strategy to adopt given the research aim of the study. In addition, there is an emphasis within thematic analysis on staying close to the original data (Spencer et al., 2014) which was helpful given the goal of capturing the social world as the participants understood and interpreted it.

Cross-sectional thematic analysis was carried out after each wave of interviews. The first stage in this process entailed transcribing the interviews verbatim as required for thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This was helpful in gaining familiarity with the data. During analysis the full transcripts were used; however, in the quotes reported in the proceeding chapters, utterances such as "um" have been removed for ease of reading. To ensure consistency, a template and guidelines for transcription were created and followed (Neale et al., 2016). After each audio recording was transcribed, a summary was produced that outlined the participant's biographical information, details relevant to her Universal Credit claim and key information in relation to the three research questions (Neale, 2019; Spencer et al., 2014). After the second wave of interviews, the summaries also included details of presence or absence of change in relation to biographical and Universal Credit claim

information and experiences and views relating to the three research questions. Further familiarisation with the data was obtained through repeated readings of the transcripts (Spencer et al., 2014; Braun and Clarke, 2012). This helped to produce a coding framework that contained salient codes identified in the transcripts as well as codes that were derived from the research questions and the interview guide (Spencer et al., 2014; Attride-Stirling, 2001). Following this, the transcripts were coded and the coding framework was refined (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The codes were then developed into themes and organised according to their relevance to the research questions (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The analysis then proceeded with a description of the themes followed by a more in-depth exploration that sought to offer interpretations of, and explanations for, the themes in the data. For example the themes were investigated for connections between, and variations in, experiences and perspectives in relation to characteristics of the sample such as class (Spencer et al., 2014; Joffe, 2012). Throughout the analysis, NVivo was used to improve the efficiency and ease of managing a large volume of data (Spencer et al., 2014; Joffe, 2012).

Once both waves of interviews had been analysed cross-sectionally, the entire data set was analysed longitudinally. The data was interrogated for presence or absence of change in the mothers' circumstances, and experiences of, and views on, the conditionality within Universal Credit. To aid this a set of matrices was created (Neale, 2019; Lewis, 2007). There was one matrix per theme and also a matrix for the biographical and Universal Credit claim information. The cases were listed along the vertical axis and the waves of interviews along the horizontal axis. Each box contained in summary form key information relating to the relevant theme. This enabled the data to be read in various ways and for comparisons to be made within and across cases, and through time (Neale, 2019). The next stage entailed constructing plausible accounts of the patterns of change observed and providing explanations concerning how and why change had—or had not—occurred (Neale, 2019). The analytic process culminated with the writing up of the findings. This involved answering the research questions on the basis of the themes in the data and relating the findings to the existing research and theory (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001). Consent was obtained from the participants to archive

the anonymised data for future researchers to use (Neale, 2019; Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014).

4.5.5. Dissemination activities

Over the course of the study, the research findings have been disseminated in different ways to various stakeholders and audiences to create impact. After the first wave of interviews, a summary of the research findings was sent to the participants to enhance dissemination, reciprocity and maintenance of the sample. Creating an accessible output at the end of the study for the participants, and also the stakeholders they wanted to influence, was considered crucial. Therefore, an accessible leaflet outlining the main research findings and policy recommendations has been developed in conjunction with a graphic designer. In addition to relevant stakeholders, this will be sent to the participants to aid reciprocity and dissemination and also to show the participants that the findings are being communicated more broadly (MacKenzie, Christensen and Turner, 2015; Fernandez, Kodish and Weijer, 2003).

Another central dissemination activity was delivering a seminar to the DWP Universal Credit Analysis Division. This involved giving a presentation and then answering questions from attendees. In the presentation, I prioritised the accounts of the participants and communicated policy recommendations devised by the participants: there were high levels of positive engagement with these during the ensuing discussion. I have also been interviewed for a documentary on Universal Credit produced for The Canary (a UK-based news website that focuses on political affairs). Academic dissemination has included speaking at conferences and events including the Money, Security and Social Policy Universal Credit Event 2019, the Social Policy Association Annual Conference 2019 and the Welfare Conditionality Project Conference 2018, and delivering workshops for academic education programmes. In all of the dissemination activities, care was taken to ensure the terminology, format and content was appropriate to the intended audiences (Morton and Nutley, 2011).

4.6 Conducting ethical research

Throughout the research careful attention was given to conducting the study in an ethical manner (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014) and the potential impact of the research on the participants was particularly considered (Elliott, 2005). The use of QLR heightened ethical issues (such as informed consent and confidentiality) and therefore required further consideration of ethical practices (Neale, 2019; Neale and Hanna, 2012). The research used both pro-active and re-active ethical strategies (Neale and Hanna, 2012). The pro-active strategy entailed developing ethical procedures derived from commonly held principles. The re-active strategy involved responding to unexpected ethical dilemmas as they arose. These are more likely in QLR given the longer time-frame of inquiry (Neale, 2019).

The pro-active ethical strategy entailed drawing on, and adhering to, existing ethical frameworks and in particular the British Sociological Association's ethical guidelines (2002). The pro-active strategy also entailed considering and articulating how key ethical principles would be followed through submitting an ethics application to the ethics committee of the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York, which received approval. Key ethical issues considered before carrying out the fieldwork included informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, prevention of harm and reciprocity. Prior to the interviews, the participants were given an information leaflet which explained who was conducting the research and what it was about, what participation entailed, procedures relating to confidentiality and details of the gift voucher (Hewitt, 2007; Sin, 2005). At the beginning of the interviews, the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix E). The participants were informed they could withdraw from the research at any time, refuse to answer any question and stop the interview if they wished (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014). As the research was longitudinal, consent was ongoing and access was renegotiated before the second wave of interviews (Neale, 2019; Miller and Bell, 2002). After an interval of approximately six months, participants were asked if they wanted to take part in a second interview. At the beginning of the second interviews I reminded the participants of the purpose of the study, the confidentiality (and limits to this) of the interviews and the right to refuse to answer any questions or stop the

interview, and the participants signed a second consent form (Neale and Hanna, 2012).

Confidentiality and anonymity were very carefully maintained during this study. The use of QLR brings exacerbated difficulties in maintaining confidentiality due to the accumulation of a large volume of identifying information (Neale, 2019). Also, the circumstances of some of the participants (for example, prior experiences of domestic abuse) meant extra caution was needed to prevent inadvertently revealing the participants' identities. Therefore, the transcripts have been thoroughly anonymised despite the resulting loss of some contextual data (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014). Other measures to ensure confidentiality included storing data securely: recordings, transcripts and personal information were stored separately on a University of York server and were password protected, and the informed consent forms were stored in a locked cabinet. A data management plan that addressed these issues was produced and followed. While extensive measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and assurances given to the participants, they were also made aware that there were limits to the confidentiality and were informed that in the event of disclosure of risk of harm to a vulnerable person, confidentiality would be overridden (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014; Hewitt, 2007). However, this did not occur during the research.

To adhere to the principle of preventing harm to participants, consideration was given to how the interviews could have potentially negative impacts (Sin, 2005). In particular, as interviews can cover distressing experiences (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014; Elliott, 2005), care was taken to handle the participant's accounts sensitively. I also took the details of relevant organisations to the interviews in case any participants needed signposting to appropriate support (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Hewitt, 2007). I also considered the implications for my personal safety and carried out a risk assessment. Safety measures included informing my supervisors of the time and location of each interview, sending a text message before and afterwards, using the SafeZone app and taking a panic button to interviews held at participants' homes. As some of the participants' accounts covered distressing material, I spaced the interviews out and

allowed time afterwards to reflect on the contents (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

The research also adhered to the principle of reciprocity, strongly advocated by some feminist researchers (for example, Oakley, 1981). If the participants asked questions about the research or myself, I answered openly. However, if the participants asked more complicated questions about Universal Credit, I referred them to appropriate advice services as I did not want to inadvertently give incorrect information. Giving the participants a £20 gift voucher for each interview they participated in was also a reciprocal gesture, as the vouchers were given to thank the participants for their time and willingness to share their experiences and views (Neale, 2019; Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014). However, it would be disingenuous to deny that they also served as a form of encouragement for people to take part in the research (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014) as mention of the gift vouchers was made on the information leaflet. Reciprocity was also enacted by offering to send the participants a summary of the findings following both waves of interviews, which the vast majority of the participants accepted.

While it was essential to consider and address the ethical issues discussed above, I also needed to adopt a re-active strategy as it is impossible to predict all ethical matters that will arise from the research from the beginning (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014; Sin, 2005; Saldaña, 2003). This strategy entailed responding to ethical dilemmas and issues in a way that took the specificity and context of the interview into account (Edwards and Mauthner, 2002). For example, in conducting the interviews, on occasion I re-worded some of the questions as I realised that some would be tactless due to the particular circumstances of the relevant participants. Also, at times unexpected issues occurred that revealed the tension between the ethics and the quality of the research (Webster, Lewis and Brown, 2014). On one occasion a primary-school aged child was unexpectedly present for the interview. This posed a dilemma as I was not sure whether some of the questions regarding the child's father would be upsetting for the child. I decided to leave out the questions despite the resulting lack of completeness of the research (Hewitt, 2007) due to the potential for causing harm. Practicing reflexivity, discussed in the next section, also helped me to respond to unexpected ethical dilemmas.

4.7 Enhancing research quality through reflexive practice

To enhance research quality, reflexivity was practiced at each stage of the research process. Reflexivity originates in the premise that no research, regardless of the methodology employed, is objective or neutral (Letherby, 2003; Mason, 2002). The researcher's background and views inevitably influence key aspects of the research including the choice of topic, methods used and communication of the findings (Malterud, 2001). Therefore, it is essential to practice reflexivity and thereby make explicit one's values, beliefs and experiences relevant to the research and also the motivation for conducting the research (Letherby, 2003; Malterud, 2001; Campbell and Wasco, 2000). Through this process, preconceptions are acknowledged rather than entirely eliminated. This improves the trustworthiness of the research by helping readers to understand the context to the claims being made (Letherby, 2003).

Of relevance to this research, I am a mother to two children and highly value unpaid care. However, as a mother I have also undertaken part-time work, and part-time and full-time study. Resulting from experiences of interacting with residents of a homeless hostel who had received a sanction, and a predisposition to consider withholding financial resources to meet basic needs unethical, I am critical of the use of conditionality and sanctions within the benefits system. These views and experiences were highly influential in the choice to investigate the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit. My identities and experiences also impacted upon the rapport I developed with the study's participants. For example, I was able to empathise with the difficulties of finding paid work that fits in with caring responsibilities. However, care was taken to avoid assuming that my views and experiences were the same as the participants'. There were also key ways in which I differed from the participants. For example, while I have claimed CTCs and WTCs (two of the benefits subsumed by Universal Credit), I have not claimed unemployment benefits or been subject to conditionality. Also, in some cases there were differences between the participants and myself along class, ethnicity and educational lines which may have limited the extent to which I was able to establish rapport and fully understand the participants' accounts. The longitudinal nature of the research also influenced the rapport that was built. The majority of the second

interviews were longer than the first ones and three of the five participants who had opted to meet in a public place for the first interview invited me to their homes for the second one, which suggests that conducting research over time gave more scope for building rapport.

To practice reflexivity, throughout the study I kept a journal in which I recorded the progress I was making, the challenges I was encountering and my reflections on these. Writing field notes after each interview and transcribing the interviews myself were conducive to reflecting on the interviews and my role in them, particularly my questioning technique. I did not consider that merely reflecting on my role in the research process to be adequate to improving the quality of the research as making positions explicit does not eradicate misrepresentations of participants' accounts (Pillow, 2003). While holding that all research entails a degree of subjectivity and that I will have inevitably influenced the research outcomes, I also adopted various strategies to try to ensure the findings reflected the views and experiences of the participants rather than myself (Shenton, 2004). These included asking the participants open ended questions and responding consistently to the participants' comments.

4.8 Conclusion

This account of the methodology employed for the study has aimed to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba, 1981). A full account of the research methods has been provided so that readers can scrutinise the integrity of the study (Shenton, 2004). The use of QLR, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis have been justified in terms of their appropriateness to the research questions (Blaxter, 1996). The theoretical underpinnings of the study (chiefly social constructionism and interpretivism) have been made explicit (Shenton, 2004; Maynard, 1994) along with an acknowledgement that the findings do not represent objective reality but instead a construction of knowledge mainly on the part of the research participants but also influenced by the researcher (Hewitt, 2007). Additionally, this account has demonstrated how ethical issues were considered and prioritised throughout the research. Throughout the study, from the theoretical orientation to the specific methods of data collection and

analysis, the accounts of the participants were considered central and efforts have been made to ensure the findings reflect these accounts. While the nature of the research posed challenges and the study inevitably has limitations (discussed further in Chapter 8.5), the views and experiences of a range of mothers subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit was obtained. These have provided detailed insight into the research questions, as discussed in the proceeding chapters.

Chapter 5: The implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for the valuing of unpaid care

5.1 Introduction

Women routinely hold a marginalised position in dominant gendered citizenship frameworks (Lister, 2003; Hancock, 2000; Cass, 1994; Pateman, 1989) (see Chapter 2.2.1). The primary duty of citizenship has long been viewed as paid work and the citizen is perceived in masculine terms: as an economically independent wage earner unrestricted by caring responsibilities (Orloff, 2009; Lister, 2003; Cass, 1994). Unpaid care has not been viewed as an integral part of citizenship (Lynch and Lyons, 2009a). To create a more inclusive citizenship framework, some feminists have argued that citizenship needs to be redefined to recognise the importance of unpaid care (Pateman, 2005; Tronto, 2001; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Knijn and Kremer, 1997). However, in the UK and beyond, there has been an increasing application of conditionality, which may work against feminist aims to create citizenship frameworks that promote unpaid care as a valid citizenship contribution (see Chapter 2). There are concerns that conditionality policies fail to recognise and value unpaid care (Cain, 2016; Davies, 2015; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Grabham and Smith, 2010; Conaghan, 2009). Within the conditionality discourse, unpaid care is viewed as a barrier to paid work (Davies, 2015; Deacon and Patrick, 2011) and there is a lack of attention paid to the relational and affective orientation of unpaid care. To investigate these concerns, this chapter addresses the following research question:

How, and why, does the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit affect women's roles and responsibilities regarding unpaid care across time?

Section 5.2 of this chapter outlines the participants' caring responsibilities. Section 5.3 discusses the extent to which caring responsibilities were taken into account during the Universal Credit claim. Section 5.4 explores the effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit on the mothers' caring responsibilities and

Section 5.5 discusses the mothers' commitment to unpaid care and their views on whether it is valued within the Universal Credit system.

5.2 Overview of the participants' caring responsibilities

Women remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid care despite their entrance in significant numbers into the paid labour market (Jupp et al., 2019; Boyer et al., 2017; Lewis, 2009; Orloff, 2009). The gendered imbalance in responsibility for unpaid care was strongly evident across the sample. At the first wave of interviews, the fathers had regular contact time with their children in only five of the twenty-one lone parent families. For the most part, the contact time took place every other weekend. One of the lone mothers looked after her children for four days a week while their father looked after them for three days a week. For the rest of the lone parent families, there was either no contact time at all or irregular contact with the fathers. In some cases, contact with the father was not possible, for example due to previous domestic abuse (experienced by six of the mothers) or because the father lived far away. Some of the mothers explained how the lack of contact their children had with their fathers impacted their caring responsibilities:

Given also like their dad's behaviour and he's not really involved I kind of really want to be there for them...we don't have any other relatives here and we're not really in touch with my husband's family...I am all they have so I need to be there for them. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three, wave one)*

They don't see their dads really so I'm like mum and dad. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

Of the three coupled families, in one couple the mother and father carried out a fairly equal amount of the unpaid care, in another the mother carried out the majority of the unpaid care and in the other, the child spent half of his time with his mother and her new partner and half with his father. At the time of the second interview, one of the coupled mothers had separated from her husband and subsequently had a greater responsibility for unpaid care. For the lone mothers, the contact time with the

children's fathers had stayed the same for ten of the families. It had reduced or ceased in five of the families and increased in three of the families. In addition to having the majority or sole responsibility for unpaid care, six of the mothers also had the sole responsibility for financially providing for their children as they did not receive any child maintenance payments. A further two mothers only received minimal amounts.

Regarding help with childcare from family and friends, two of the mothers had regular help and one of the mothers had various family members who were available to help as and when needed. Many of the mothers had either occasional help or help available in an emergency. Five of the mothers had no help from family and friends. In addition, in ten of the families, one or more of the children had additional needs (in the form of speech delays, learning disabilities or mental health issues) or needed extra support following their parents' separation or divorce. During the two waves of interviews, many of the mothers highlighted the intensity of the labour and time involved in caring for children (Lynch and Walsh, 2009) and explained how their caring responsibilities necessitated many activities in addition to direct interaction with their children:

...shopping, cooking, cleaning, organising, planning diaries, thinking about managing behaviour, social life for children, managing money, budgeting.

There's quite a lot of things really that go into managing a home and a family.

(P2, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one)

Overall, the majority of the mothers interviewed had either the sole or the vast majority of the responsibility for the care of the children (and in some cases the sole financial responsibility for their children) with little support from family and friends. This gendered imbalance in responsibility for unpaid care was significant to the mothers' experiences of conditionality and was rarely recognised within the Universal Credit system as illustrated in the following sections.

5.3 The extent to which caring responsibilities were taken into account

While Universal Credit regulations stipulate the expected number of hours of work preparation and job search for lead carers according to the age of the youngest child (see Chapter 3.3.2), work coaches have discretion in setting the work-related requirements. According to government literature, work coaches tailor work-related requirements (including the type of work, location of work and hours claimants need to be available for work) to individual circumstances including caring responsibilities (DWP, 2020e). Therefore, the formation of the Claimant Commitment which stipulates work-related requirements is of crucial importance in the recognition of caring responsibilities. Ongoing interactions with work coaches are also relevant to the extent to which caring responsibilities are taken into account as work coaches are largely responsible for implementing conditionality on an ongoing basis. For example, after an initial period, work coaches can determine the frequency, length and format (for example, in-person or telephone) of work search review appointments (SSAC, 2019). This section considers the limited extent to which caring responsibilities were taken into account when the Claimant Commitment was formed and during ongoing interactions with work coaches, and discusses the mothers' perceptions concerning the lack of personalisation of work-related requirements.

5.3.1. The forming of the Claimant Commitment

In contrast to the government literature (DWP, 2020e), the majority of the mothers interviewed did not think their caring responsibilities were taken into account when the work-related requirements were set. Most of the mothers felt that there was a singular emphasis on paid work and that it was their responsibility to negotiate the work-related requirements of Universal Credit and their caring responsibilities:

They didn't really talk about that. It felt like that was just my responsibility whatever I did. Like I'm being helped with X amount of money and I've got to divide that up and figure out how I'm going to look after my kids on my own.
(P1, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one)

They don't [take caring responsibilities into account]. That's not their problem...They forget you have children. They don't take it into consideration at all. *(P20, coupled mother, two children aged four and two, wave one)*

They don't ask you nothing. And I don't even think they really care...Kids don't come into consideration. Being single parent doesn't come into consideration at all. Cos they're talking about jobs. *(P24, lone mother, three children aged twelve, ten and five, wave one)*

Many of the other participants also said they were not asked about their caring responsibilities, for example whether their children had any contact time with their fathers or whether they had any help with childcare from family or friends. The absence of discussions regarding caring responsibilities is significant, particularly for those with extensive responsibilities, as this is a necessary precursor to tailoring work-related requirements. One of the mothers expressed resentment at the lack of discussion of her personal circumstances and the setting of the standard expectation of twenty-five hours of job search:

On what basis have you [work coach] decided that I have a spare twenty-five hours a week to give to you or to work with two children? He doesn't understand any of my personal circumstances so how can he make that assumption that I can do that? *(P19, lone mother, two children aged ten and seven, wave two)*

On occasions when some of the mothers raised issues concerning the number of hours of job search given their caring responsibilities, they were not met with accommodations:

She [work coach] was like, "Well I had to do it." You know and I just thought I don't like you {laughs}. You know, it's like you're not very nice {laughs}. You're not very understanding and, "I had an autistic son and stuff," and I says, "Well I've got one with dyslexia and hypermobility and he's also got problems with concentration and stuff." *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

Similarly, another mother whose two children both had dyspraxia and needed extra support from her, did not receive an easement in her work-search hours despite her work coach's awareness of her children's additional needs.

As other research (Andersen, 2019) has found, in a few cases work-related requirements went beyond Universal Credit legislation. For example, one mother was required to undertake thirty hours of job search a week when her youngest child was three years old (under Universal Credit regulations, the maximum job search requirement is sixteen hours a week if the youngest child is aged three). Other mothers were required to job search despite household earnings being above the AET (see Chapter 3.3.2). These cases of incorrect application of work-related requirements may be due to low understanding of the Universal Credit legislation on the part of some work coaches (cf. Woudheysen, 2019).

Six of the mothers did perceive that their caring responsibilities were taken into account when their work-related requirements were set. As one mother explained concerning her work coach:

She was very understanding and she made sure that when we was discussing Commitments my children was kind of taken into consideration.
(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one)

Of the six mothers who thought their caring responsibilities had been taken into account, five had an easement in their work-related requirements on the grounds of health, their housing situation or experiences of domestic abuse. Most of these easements are a legal requirement (see Chapter 3.3.2). The mothers who had an easement tended to have particularly positive relationships with their work coaches (see Chapter 6.5.1), were among the minority of the participants who reported that their Claimant Commitment had been negotiated (see Chapter 7.3) and were more likely to experience understanding and leniency from their work coaches in regard to ongoing enforcement of mandatory work-related requirements (see Chapter 7.4). One of the mothers who did not have an easement reported that her work coach took her caring responsibilities into account as she was understanding and tailored the distance the participant was required to travel to look for paid work. Some of the

other mothers similarly received a reduction in the distance that they were required to travel to find paid work on account of their caring responsibilities and in this regard there was some recognition of caring responsibilities. However, none of the mothers received a reduction in their job search hours—an arguably more salient aspect of the Claimant Commitment—on account of their caring responsibilities.

The interview data suggests that there was a lack of awareness on the part of work coaches as to the discretion they had in setting work-related requirements. Some participants reported that their work coaches told them they had to assign a certain number of job search hours and other participants had the understanding that it was beyond the scope of the work coach to tailor the work-related requirements:

She said to me, “I have to give you the thirty hours you know that’s the minimum.” *(P17, lone parent, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

I think that’s [the number of job search hours] nothing to do with the work coach or the searcher. That’s just what is expected of a person claiming Universal Credit. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave one)*

Therefore, although some of the mothers felt their work coaches (and particularly those who were parents themselves) did have an understanding of their caring responsibilities, they perceived their work coaches were limited in their ability to alter the work-related requirements. As a result, their work coaches’ understanding of their caring responsibilities did not make a substantial difference to the setting of the work-related requirements. The limited extent to which caring responsibilities were taken into account in the participants’ Claimant Commitments corresponds with findings from the Welfare Conditionality Project (Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018). Research investigating the tailoring of Claimant Commitments to personal circumstances within the broader population of claimants has found inconsistencies (SSAC, 2019) and a public inquiry into benefits sanctions found that for many groups of claimants, including lone parents, Claimant Commitments are not personalised (Work and Pensions Committee, 2018a).

5.3.2. Ongoing interactions with work coaches

The participants' ongoing interactions with their work coaches also give indications of the limited extent to which caring responsibilities are recognised within the Universal Credit conditionality regime. The longitudinal component of the study highlighted two relevant issues: the arrangements for work search review appointments and job search requirements during school holidays. Regarding work search review appointments, several mothers spoke of appointments being arranged for times that were not compatible with caring responsibilities, for example, outside school hours or during school drop off and pick up times. As one mother explained of her phone appointments:

They're making the phone calls at quarter past three. Well I'm at the school gate at quarter past three. You miss that appointment you get sanctioned.
(P24, lone mother, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two)

Another of the participants had an upcoming work search review appointment arranged for her youngest child's birthday. She explained how this made her feel:

It does make you feel like you're not a normal family when you're on this kind of benefit and it changes based on how old your children are and you need to go in and do this paperwork or whatever is required on their birthday whereas a regular family could you know go for a day out or something so. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three, wave two)*

Other participants expressed frustration at the lack of consideration of caring responsibilities when work search review appointments were arranged. However, consistent with the finding above that the mothers with easements tended to think their caring responsibilities had been taken into account when the Claimant Commitments were formed, some of the mothers with easements reported that their work coaches demonstrated consideration of caring responsibilities when making arrangements for appointments:

The work coach was understanding because actually she'd make the appointments in school time. So she'd go, "Oh no it's three o'clock, we can't do the three o'clock one because you'll have your son coming home." (P8, *lone mother, two children aged thirteen and eleven, wave two*)

This demonstrates the importance of work coaches who have a detailed awareness of the responsibilities involved in caring for children (House of Lords Hansard, 2015a). For some of the participants, over time, their work coaches became a little more accommodating of caring responsibilities, for example through arranging telephone, rather than in-person, work search review appointments:

Now on they told me now they're going to ring me because I can't go. And they told me I have to attend an appointment but I can't because the time I left straight away I have to pick up my children...They say okay, now on they're going to ring me every time. (P13, *lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave two*)

However, others continued to experience difficulties with the timings of appointments (including for some who had asked for appointments to be arranged during preschool or school hours):

(*Wave One*) You arrange the appointment to be when she's at playschool, then they'll say okay and do it for like half-two when you've asked for it to be at half-ten. You've got to re-arrange it again and re-arrange it again.

(*Wave Two*) I think on average I'll swap backwards and forwards the times maybe about three times for the same appointment...I'll feel like I'll keep going backwards and forwards to get a time that's perfect for the school...even with my same work coach. It's like every single time. (P16, *lone mother, one child aged four*)

While the work coaches' consideration of caring responsibilities was variable in regard to setting appointment times, there was a uniform lack of consideration of caring responsibilities with respect to job search requirements during school

holidays. None of the mothers reported a reduction in job search requirements during the school holidays and most of the mothers stated that there was no discussion with their work coaches concerning this. One participant responded to a question regarding whether her work coach had discussed work-related requirements during the school holidays by replying:

Oh no no no no because if you're at home you're at home, you're not actually doing anything...So you don't have to do any washing up or the washing or hoovering or cleaning or entertaining a child who's bored of being stuck in. Yeah they don't they don't consider that. *(P18, lone mother, two children aged fourteen and seven, wave two)*

Two of the participants appear to have received some understanding of the difficulties of job search during the school holidays yet were still required to job search as one of the mothers explained:

The JobCentre did actually say that they understand it's the school holidays and the most difficult time to find work so they're not expecting any great success but try anyway. *(P23, lone mother, two children aged eight and seven, wave two)*

This lack of reductions in job search requirements during the school holidays is particularly problematic given that those searching for paid work are not eligible for help with childcare costs under Universal Credit (DWP, 2020c) and subsequently the mothers had to fulfil extensive work-related requirements while looking after their children full-time (discussed further in Chapter 6.6). Previously, under the lone parent flexibilities (see Chapter 3.3.2), lone parents were exempt from job search during the school holidays if it would be unreasonable for the claimant to arrange childcare (see Appendix A). The absence of discussions around childcare in the school holidays and the lack of reductions in job search requirements suggests that the lone parent flexibilities are not being applied by work coaches. This reinforces concerns about the downgrading of these flexibilities from legislation to discretionary guidance under Universal Credit legislation (Cain, 2016; Gingerbread, 2013).

5.3.3. Perceptions of the personalisation of work-related requirements

Indications that mothers' caring responsibilities are not routinely taken into account within the Universal Credit conditionality regime are further evidenced by the mothers' views on the personalisation in the system. Unprompted, fifteen of the mothers commented on the lack of consideration of personal circumstances within the Universal Credit conditionality regime. In direct contrast to the government literature (DWP, 2020a), some of the mothers commented that work-related requirements are not tailored to individual circumstances:

It's completely and utterly tailored to fit your personal circumstances I think is not true and I think there's only certain ways that it can be made to apply to you and you have to conform to its rules to make it work. *(P2, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one)*

You get all put into a band and if you're a single mum, two children, you have to earn that and you have to do this. If you're a working mum, if you're not working but you're just all categorising and then you're put into a box and you have to meet them requirements. So I feel personal circumstances should be taken into consideration. Massively, yeah, definitely. *(P19, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven, wave one)*

Many of the mothers commented on the need for increased consideration of personal circumstances in relation to their roles as mothers and their caring responsibilities:

It would be good for people to be dealt with according to their circumstances and things tailored...dealing with mothers individually as per their circumstances really...particularly single parents who are under a lot of pressure. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

I think people's circumstances need to be taken into account...I think they need to be a bit more realistic with mothers' situations. *(P18, lone mother, two children aged fourteen and six, wave one)*

On the whole, the experiences and views of the mothers demonstrate that throughout the Universal Credit claim, work-related requirements are not tailored to claimants' caring responsibilities. Lipsky's (2010) influential work on the role of frontline workers provides some insights as to why work coaches do not use discretion when setting work-related requirements for lead carers. As Hjørne et al. (2010) explain, a key dilemma for front-line workers identified by Lipsky is between responsiveness and standardisation. Responsiveness refers to taking into account service users' individual circumstances whereas standardisation means treating service users the same. In practice, it is very difficult for front-line workers to carry out responsiveness as they are constrained by their work contexts (van Berkel, 2017; Hjørne, Juhila and van Nijnatten, 2010). A key constraint is lack of time and high caseloads (Lipsky, 2010). Correspondingly, research conducted by the SSAC (2019) suggests the lack of tailoring of Claimant Commitments is partly due to the brevity of the initial meeting in which this document is developed. Also, under Universal Credit, work coaches have larger caseloads due to the increased number of people subject to conditionality and also the reductions in contracted out provision⁶ (Work and Pensions Committee, 2016b). Lipsky (2010) claims that as a result of such pressures, front-line workers often adopt routines and simplifications so they can manage their work. Regarding Universal Credit work coaches, this may entail giving claimants the standard number of work-search hours rather than tailoring them, due to the time that would be needed to find out and consider the relevant information from the claimants.

Another reason for the lack of personalisation may be that the work coaches do not have the personal resources to tailor work-related requirements to caring responsibilities (Toerien et al., 2013; Lipsky, 2010). Under Universal Credit, work coaches are generalists who work with a range of claimants with different needs (SSAC, 2019; Work and Pensions Committee, 2018a). The loss of specialist Lone Parent Advisers (see Chapter 3.3.4.2) may be particularly problematic for claimants

⁶ In 2017, the Work Programme, wherein welfare-to-work provision was outsourced to private and third-party organisations, was ended and replaced by the Work and Health Programme. This new programme is much smaller in its scope and therefore many claimants who previously would have been referred to external providers are now assigned to JCP work coaches.

with caring responsibilities. Previous research has shown that lone parents who had a Lone Parent Adviser had the most positive experiences of interactions with the JCP and that the phasing out of these specialist advisors has led to a loss of understanding of the issues lone parents face (Graham and McQuaid, 2014). As work coaches within Universal Credit are generalists, they may not have an awareness of pertinent issues such as school drop off and pick up times, the challenges of trying to fulfil work-related requirements during school holidays or the relevance of the amount of contact time children have with their father to a mother's ability to engage in paid work. In addition to a lack of awareness of how to appropriately apply discretion, the findings suggest some work coaches are unaware of the discretion they are afforded in the Universal Credit system.

The absence of tailoring the standard work-related expectations to claimants' caring responsibilities is problematic given the extensiveness of the standard expectations stipulated in the Universal Credit legislation. One participant described her response to being told during a work search review appointment that she was expected to undertake paid work for twenty-five hours a week:

I said, "I don't know how you expect that from a single mum." I said, "I can't do it." (P19, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven, wave one)

From this claimant's perspective, the standard work-related expectations are too high for lone mothers regardless of their circumstances. Many of the other mothers also thought the work-related requirements placed on them were too extensive and did not take into consideration the multiple activities involved in caring for children:

There's an awful lot that goes into managing a home and that you can't just necessarily guarantee that every single moment they're at school can be spent purely working. (P2, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one)

I think it is a bit difficult because when you've got children there are so many things you need to do during the day just like getting them to school, getting them back from school, keeping them fed, making sure everything's okay and

to fit all the hours in the day as well as the hours that you need to do for a job search. *(P23, lone mother, two children aged seven and six, wave one)*

This lack of recognition of caring responsibilities shows the dominance of paid work within Universal Credit over other forms of social contribution and demonstrates that women's unequal responsibility for unpaid care has been largely overlooked in conditionality policies (Ingold and Etherington, 2013; Wright, 2011). This was particularly problematic for the study's participants given the extensiveness of their caring responsibilities. While there is some acknowledgement of caring responsibilities within the Universal Credit conditionality regime through the lower hours of required job search for lead carers of children aged three and four, and five to twelve (sixteen and twenty-five hours respectively), the expectations were still too high for many participants. Unrealistic work-related expectations that were not eased by work coach discretion resulted in the participants being subject to work-related requirements that were incompatible with their caring responsibilities. This negatively impacted their caring responsibilities as discussed in the next section.

5.4 The effects of work-related requirements and paid work on caring responsibilities

Concerns have been raised that conditionality policies fail to recognise that work-related requirements and paid employment can limit time and energy for fulfilling caring obligations (Davies, 2012; Wright, 2011; Pateman, 2005). The study's findings demonstrate the ways in which these concerns are realised in the lives of mothers subject to conditionality. This section discusses how work-related requirements and paid work affected the participants' time and interactions with their children, and highlights the challenges of taking children to the JCP.

5.4.1. Effects on time and interactions

During the course of the longitudinal research, the majority of the participants referred to the negative impacts of work-related requirements and paid work on their caring responsibilities. For many of the mothers, the work-related requirements and paid work either reduced the amount of time spent with their children or meant that

while they were with their children, they were carrying out their mandatory work-related requirements:

I don't feel that I'm doing the best that I can as a mother to hand my children over to somebody else to look after them all day while I go out and work as many hours as I can which is what is expected of us from Universal Credits. *(P12, coupled mother, two children aged fifteen and six, wave one)*

There were times when you know [youngest child] wanted mummy to play or do whatever and I was, "No, I've just got to do this. I've got a meeting tomorrow. I need to do this." Or there were times when he was ill and I was taken away from the job search and I'm like in his bedroom: "Right okay I'll be..." and I'll be sneaking off. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

The reduction in time had implications for the amount of involvement the mothers could have in their children's education and support they could give them. One of the participants obtained a job since claiming Universal Credit that entailed evening shifts. Subsequently, she was unable to continue to help her son (who had dyslexia) with his reading:

He has got that difficulty as well which is why I wanted to be more at home so that I could help him more but I don't have the time now cos I'm at work on a night. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

The work-related requirements and paid work also reduced some of the mothers' time for carrying out household tasks involved in caring for children such as cooking, tidying and cleaning. The limitations engagement in work-related requirements and paid work placed on the mothers' ability to spend time with their children, support them educationally and carry out other tasks involved in caring for children may have been particularly difficult for the participants given current expectations of intensive mothering (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Vincent, 2017) (see Chapter 3.3.4.1). One of the participants objected to the potential for sanctioning for not undertaking

the required number of hours of paid work in light of the expectation to be a ‘good mother’:

We’re doing a massive job anyway and sanctioning us is only causing more stress upon us than there is already now in society. It’s massive. And the expectations of being a good mum and you know if you’re not doing what’s right then, no, sanctioning mums, no. *(P19, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven, wave one)*

There is the implication in this comment that failing to meet the requirements of being a ‘good mother’ incurs stigma. Therefore, mothers can be penalised financially for not meeting the work-related requirements of Universal Credit but fulfilling these requirements can limit their ability to fulfil caring responsibilities, and therefore render them subject to societal condemnation. This is problematic given the stigma that lone parents receiving benefits face (Jun, 2019). The evidence reinforces concerns that Universal Credit may exacerbate such stigma and also the tensions between unpaid care and paid work lone mothers already encounter (Cain, 2016).

The work-related requirements of Universal Credit and paid work also negatively impacted the participants’ mood and tiredness levels, and therefore their interactions with their children. As the work-related requirements were often incompatible with caring responsibilities, some of the mothers stayed up late in order to fulfil their requirements resulting in tiredness. Also, many of the mothers reported feelings of stress arising from dual expectations of work-related requirements and caring responsibilities, and the possibility for sanction for failure to meet requirements (cf. Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018). As two of the mothers explained:

It’s overwhelming kind of especially when you feel like you’ve got to run a house, you’ve got to bring children up then you’ve also got to make sure that you’re putting everything in your journal and don’t miss anything out and then you’re worried that I didn’t do, I’m an hour missing, am I going to get sanctioned for that. *(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave two)*

...the pressure and the stressing. If you are just adult that one is better but you've got children. That one is making me stressing because if I know if they cut my money I don't have any work, I don't have any money. How can I look after them? ...Now on I need to feed them. They need everything. You see is difficult to me. *(P13, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave two)*

The mothers explained how the impacts of the work-related requirements and paid work on their tiredness and mood in turn negatively affected their interactions with their children:

It affects your mood and I think it affects your motivation and it just makes you just feel a bit {sighs} what's the point sometimes and that affects how you are when you're you know cos you don't feel like being like, "Oh yeah, let's do something fun,"...I think it affects your general mood and that affects general care. *(P5, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one)*

I'm tired and then I'm snappy...you have to do that expectation otherwise you won't get that money which then has a knock-on effect on your children because you can't give them what they need but it also has an effect on your mood, your attitude, your wellbeing, everything because you're worried, you're anxious. And I worry daily so that will have a knock-on effect on your children. *(P19, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven, wave one)*

He [work coach] was like, "You know well you do need to be filling in your work thing otherwise you're going to be sanctioned." So I felt like I had to fill in the work coach [sic] and show willing in every way I possibly could which whenever I do work, it really affects my ability as a parent with [daughter] because I'm more shouty, I'm panicked and highly stressed all the time. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave two)*

The majority of the mothers who did not think that their caring responsibilities were negatively affected by the work-related requirements of Universal Credit either had an easement (and therefore were subject to reduced work-related requirements) or had a more equal share of the responsibility for childcare with their ex-partner. A

further mother stated she did not think her caring responsibilities had been negatively impacted as she fulfilled her work-related requirements after her children had gone to bed. However, it may be that the subsequent tiredness she experienced did affect her caring responsibilities. This finding that those with lesser requirements or lesser responsibility for unpaid care did not consider their caring responsibilities to be negatively affected by the work-related requirements further demonstrates that a key issue for many mothers subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit is the extensiveness of the work-related requirements.

At the second wave of interviews, there was an increase in the number of mothers reporting negative impacts on caring responsibilities and also an increase in the range and extensiveness of the impacts mentioned. For the most part, this was because some mothers had moved into paid work and some had stopped their self-employed work and obtained positions as employees. One participant who worked as a self-employed cleaner at the first wave of interviews had given up her business at the second wave of interviews and obtained a job as a carer in a residential home. Whereas previously she had been able to fit her paid work around her children, her new job entailed a shift pattern which affected her children as she explained:

So now I've got a job which is really quite difficult because the shift patterns are set at seven till half-two and twelve till eight so that means now I'm having to rely on family and childminders and expect my children to get up at six o'clock in the morning to so that I can be at work but that was the only job what offered more than twenty-five hours a week so now I'm working thirty hours a week because I couldn't find a job that was twenty-five hours...

...with being self-employed I had that flexibility. I had that flexibility where I could be there and then quickly there cos I'd worked my whole diary around the children's schooling, their activities. Now I can't, I don't have that flexibility. I'm in one place and I'm not moving so I can't do anything. (P19, lone mother, two children aged ten and seven, wave two)

Her later shifts meant that she would miss teatime and bedtime with her children. As the first quote shows, she was unable to obtain a job that was compatible with her

caring responsibilities. Previous research has also shown that conditionality can push lone mothers into applying for and accepting the first job that appears regardless of compatibility with caring responsibilities (Graham and McQuaid, 2014). This indicates a problem with 'work-first' policies (see Chapter 3.3.4.2) which focus on moving claimants quickly into any paid work rather than on helping them into work that is appropriate to their circumstances.

A common impact mentioned in the second wave of interviews by those participants who had entered paid work was the increased rush the participants and their children experienced, particularly regarding getting to school and their workplaces on time. As one of the participants explained:

I feel more rushed. I just feel rushed...like we're all rushing about all the time.
(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave two)

The increased pace of life was tiring for the mothers and their children, and could result in increased tension within the families as the mothers were hurrying their children to get ready in time. Previous research has also found that working families find the demands of having to be at certain places such as school and work for particular times challenging and leads to a harried pace of life for both parents and their children (Harden, MacLean and Backett-Milburn, 2012).

Some of those who had undertaken paid work since the start of their Universal Credit claim, made some of the most pertinent comments about the impacts on their caring responsibilities:

[Youngest child is] like, "Mummy you don't play with us," and it breaks my heart but I have to come in, I have to cook tea. As soon as they come in they've been at school, they'll have been two hours at after school club, then they'll have had to walk home. They want to spend a bit of time with me. I can't because I have to then go off in the kitchen and stick the telly on to keep them you know quiet or and yeah it does impact on the quality of time. (P17, lone mother, two children aged six and five, wave two)

When I've worked last week today she [daughter] was like, "Just spend the day with Mummy please," and it's really heart-breaking when you're like, "No you're off to nursery," and she's like, "No just Mummy's house today." (P5, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one)

Whereas self-employed work and mandatory job search activity afforded a degree of flexibility, obtaining paid work as an employee resulted in more rigid schedules and therefore had a greater impact on the mothers' caring responsibilities. The self-employed mothers were mostly middle class whereas the mothers who obtained paid work as employees were mostly working class. Therefore, of concern, the caring responsibilities of the working class mothers tended to be more affected when these mothers engaged in paid work because the middle class mothers had more control over their engagement in paid work and unpaid care, particularly during the first year of their claim (see Chapter 7.4).

While the mothers who entered paid work did highlight various benefits of paid work (discussed further in Chapter 6.7.1), few spoke of the ways in which paid work positively impacted their children. Two of the mothers stated that being in paid work benefited their children materially (for example in terms of the presents the mums were able to buy for them and the possibility of going on a holiday) and a further two spoke of how being in paid work provided a positive role model for their children. One of these mothers explained:

I think it's good for [child] to see me see me working and she knows that you don't just get things for the sake of getting things. (P5, lone mother, one child aged three, wave two)

Overall, the study's findings correspond with previous research which found that while there can be positive benefits of entering paid work for lone parent families, there can also be disadvantages in terms of loss of time spent with children, more complex schedules and increased tensions within the household (Millar and Ridge, 2020, 2009; Jun, 2015) .

The analysis presented above which shows the negative impacts of work-related requirements and paid work on caring responsibilities adds to criticisms of the assumption underlying current policy that paid work is universally in the best interests of claimants (Patrick, 2012b). This assumption is also central to Universal Credit, which is designed to both promote and replicate the world of paid work (Millar and Bennett, 2017). More specifically, the extension of job search requirements to lead carers with a youngest child aged three or four years was justified on the grounds that it would result in parents moving into paid work quicker, leading to increased well-being of children and their parents (DWP, 2015e). However, the findings show that these assertions are problematic as they do not acknowledge the ways in which paid work can be detrimental to both parents and their children (cf. Crisp et al., 2009). The findings show that work-related requirements such as job search activity also have negative impacts on caring responsibilities as under Universal Credit these are extensive and are accompanied by the pressure and stress of the possibility of being sanctioned (cf. Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018).

5.4.2. Challenges of taking children to the JobCentre Plus

While several of the mothers ensured they did not have to take their children to the JCP with them, this was unavoidable for many of the mothers. The overwhelming majority of mothers who took their children to the JCP with them for appointments found this difficult, with several referring to it as a “nightmare”. Many of the mothers commented on the lack of facilities (such as toilets and children’s books and toys) and the inappropriate atmosphere:

They have no facilities. I remember [youngest child] getting a dirty nappy just before we needed to go in. I remember asking, they had no changing facilities: “No you can’t use our toilets, the nearest place is Sainsbury’s across the road.” (*P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one*)

There’s no toys for the children to play with. You have to give them your phone or bring a book or something like that whereas it would be really relevant to have a nice child friendly area. That would be really really supportive because otherwise it’s a really austere place to be bringing a child

and it's scary and could be frightening depending on who else is there. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave one)*

Many of the mothers commented that their children got bored and frustrated, and the mothers found keeping their children occupied and managing their behaviour while attending appointments challenging:

And dragging him off to sit in the JobCentre and having to give him treats which I really didn't want to do... it was just something to keep him bribed sat in the pushchair and quiet. Yeah it didn't give you a good feeling as a mother, most definitely not. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

It was awful...It was so bad...I've got quite active children, they're six and seven the boys, they've got dyspraxia, my youngest has got ADHD. I think they called the man a silly man at one point, they was playing with the pens, chucking stuff about. *(P23, lone mother, two children aged seven and six, wave one)*

These difficulties were exacerbated by the feeling of being watched by their work coach and other people in the JCP:

I just gave her a banana to keep her quiet. Keep her occupied obviously cos it is boring sitting there listening to everything that they have to tell you...trying to keep a nearly two year old busy it's not easy...sometimes it's easier just to say yes to get it over with just so you can get out of that situation cos you don't want everybody looking at you an feeling tense that she's misbehaving cos she's bored. *(P4, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one)*

They'll just up and running and then someone'll say, "Could you not run round?" And you think they're trying as much to, you can see them gritting their teeths you know thinking I wish she'd blooming tell them kids. Or I wish she'd shut up about them kids. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave two)*

Similarly, previous research conducted in New Zealand found that lone mothers felt that their parenting was being surveyed during appointments at the Work and Income offices, and within the context of welfare discourses that portray lone mothers as incompetent parents, this contributed to the oppressive atmosphere of the offices (Gray, 2017). Some of the mothers of the current study expressed resentment at the lack of accommodations for children and the difficult position they were put in. One mother considered the lack of accommodations of caring responsibilities at the JCP was evidence of a devaluing of mothers' roles. When asked the reason for her view that mothers' caring roles are not valued in the Universal Credit system, she explained:

I suppose it's like if you go to the JobCentre your appointments for Universal Credit sometimes are upstairs so if they don't have a lift, how are you supposed to get upstairs?...what are you going to do with your child upstairs? You haven't got your pushchair cos you've got to leave it down an they're not going to sit on the chair an sit there for half an hour. [Child] definitely would not. She's too lively for that. (*P4, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one*)

The finding that there was an absence of an appropriate environment for children within the JCP further demonstrates the lack of recognition and consideration of caring responsibilities within the Universal Credit conditionality regime. The failure to accommodate children within the JCP put the mothers in challenging circumstances wherein, under the gaze of both staff and other claimants, they had to look after their children while participating in mandatory appointments. At times this led to them making compromises in their parenting and incurred stress and embarrassment. There were also broader implications of this. Gray (2017) argues the environment and practices within Work and Income offices in New Zealand reinforce claimants' devalued status. There were indications from the current study that the JCP environment specifically devalued the mothers' caring roles. There were further reasons the mothers felt their caring roles were devalued in the Universal Credit system, as discussed in the next section.

5.5 Views on the valuing of unpaid care

The shift to the adult worker model and adoption of policies that attempt to increase mothers' participation in the paid labour market may underestimate women's commitment to unpaid care and, through focusing on paid employment, fail to consider and value unpaid care (McDowell, 2005). This section evidences how these claims are relevant to the conditionality within Universal Credit. It starts by outlining the participants' valuing of their unpaid caring roles and then details their views on the devaluing of care within the Universal Credit system.

5.5.1 The participants' valuing of unpaid care

The participants highly valued their unpaid caring roles in line with previous research (Lynch and Lyons, 2009a; Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Many of the mothers prioritised the unpaid care of their children over paid work:

Job's not everything...Kids come first. (P24, lone mother, three children aged twelve, ten and five, wave one)

My children is like diamond for me you see. I gonna look after my children first. (P13, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one)

The motherhood role was particularly important to some of the mothers whose children did not have contact with their fathers. One of the mothers who had experienced domestic abuse explained:

Children is the main priority because I've got to be there for them because as I say I've got no one to have them. (P8, lone mother, two children aged thirteen and ten, wave one)

Several of the mothers referred to parenting as a "job" and many spoke of the hard work involved in caring for children. As the data below demonstrates, the mothers considered their unpaid care to be an important contribution in the present and also for the future:

I get great satisfaction out of everything like knowing that I've done it all. It makes me proud. If I've achieved something I know it's that I know my kids are well looked after. *(P19, lone mother, two children aged ten and seven, wave two)*

It's the best job in the world. It's the best thing you can do in your life honest to God...it's a human being that's going to, hopefully if you've done the job correctly, they're going to do something good in the world. *(P24, lone mother, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two)*

These comments show the pride some of the mothers took in this role. For some of the mothers, this was a role they wanted to fulfil themselves:

I want to look after them, I don't want anybody else to look after them. That's why I chose to be a mum to be a mum to them. *(P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and ten, wave two)*

You don't have children for other people to look after them. You like to spend some time with them. *(P20, coupled mother, two children aged four and two, wave one)*

While many of the mothers spoke of caring for their children as a "job" or in terms of "work", they also highlighted the relational, affective and interdependent aspects of caring (Williams, 2012; Bowlby et al., 2010) which distinguish unpaid care from paid work, including paid care work (Cantillon and Lynch, 2017). For example, many of the mothers spoke about their desire to "be there" for their children (cf. Ribbens McCarthy and Edwards, 2002). Also, some of the mothers spoke of their love for their children and time spent with them, while acknowledging difficulties and tensions involved in caring for children:

Obviously he's a pain in the backside as they all are but you know he's my world and I won't be without him. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen, wave one)*

I really enjoy doing stuff with the children and spending time with them. (P2, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven, wave two)

I'd always wanted them. I love them to bits. I know sometimes they annoy me but kids do don't they? (P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave two)

These findings demonstrate that the mothers considered their caring roles to be an important part of their identities and were roles they wanted to carry out (albeit with variations in the desired balance between paid work and unpaid care as discussed further in Chapter 7.2). For many of the mothers, these roles were a source of enjoyment, pride and satisfaction. While some research has found this specifically in relation to working class mothers (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Gillies 2007), in this study it applied regardless of class. The mothers' caring roles were also seen as a significant responsibility and to entail hard work and challenges (Lynch and Lyons, 2009b) which questions portrayals of benefit recipients by the media and in the government literature as inactive and irresponsible (Patrick, 2017). The findings regarding the relational and affective aspects of unpaid care also point to the problematic assumption within the government discourse that care is a barrier to paid work and can be fully commodified (Lynch and Walsh, 2009).

5.5.2 The participants' views on whether unpaid care is valued within the Universal Credit system

While the mothers highly valued their caring roles, twenty out of the twenty-four mothers said they did not think unpaid care was valued in the Universal Credit system. There were a variety of reasons given for this. Some of these reasons concerned the lack of discussions with their work coaches about their children, the lack of personalisation of work-related requirements, the unrealistic expectations placed on them and the lack of choice regarding engagement in paid work (see Chapter 7). A particularly common response was the emphasis on paid work within the Universal Credit system:

I think all they're interested in is trying to get people out to work. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

It just seems that they want everybody to be out working now regardless of what you do or...your role as a parent, as a mother. They think you should be out working. *(P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and nine, wave one)*

Several of the mothers also expressed frustration that the government is willing to pay for other people to look after their children, but does not provide mothers with the financial resources to look after their children themselves and instead compels them to undertake paid work. One of the mothers, a childminder who looked after children whose parents received financial assistance from the government to pay for her childminding services, commented:

I think about it every day of like well I'm being paid to look after these kids doing the exact same thing but not being paid to look after my own kids but I could be paying someone else to do the exact same thing with them and then claim the money back. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three, wave one)*

The willingness of the government to pay for childcare provided within the paid labour market but not to financially support unpaid care provided by children's own parents reinforces claims that within welfare reforms aimed at increasing mothers' paid labour market participation, value is only placed on activity if it is financially remunerated (McDowell, 2005; Kingfisher, 2002). This results in the devaluing of unpaid societal contributions including unpaid care (McDowell, 2005; Kingfisher, 2002) and ignores relational values such as love and care (McDowell, 2005) which were important to the study's participants.

Two of the mothers gave ambivalent responses regarding the valuing of care within the Universal Credit system. Both mothers felt their unpaid caring roles were valued given they had received understanding from their work coaches yet they also felt the Universal Credit system as a whole was not set up to acknowledge caring

responsibilities. A further two mothers, both of whom had an easement, did think that unpaid care was valued in the Universal Credit system. One mother referred to the option to undertake part-time paid work and the other mother explained her advisor had been understanding of her caring responsibilities. The longitudinal aspect of the study found that over time, there was little change in how the mothers perceived unpaid care was valued in the Universal Credit system:

(Wave One) I would say they're [mothers' caring roles] not recognised and not valued. No absolutely not.

(Wave Two) It's stressful I think especially when you feel that your view is at odds with the world I suppose because you feel that that's [caring for children] actually at the at the end of days that's what counts and to feel that that's not how...the people at the top feel I think is a yeah, it just feels a bit of a burden on your shoulders really. *(P2, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven)*

One of the mothers who previously stated she did not think unpaid care was valued in the Universal Credit system gave a more ambivalent response in the second interview as she had received understanding from her work coach during a particularly difficult time with her ex-partner. The mother who previously stated she did think unpaid care was valued on account of her work coach's understanding also gave a more ambivalent response in the second interview wherein she highlighted the lack of choice to engage in paid work and the overall lack of personalisation within the system. The prevalence of references to work coach understanding of caring responsibilities among these views suggests that while understanding of caring responsibilities can make little difference to the work-related requirements, it can make a positive difference as to whether the mothers perceive that their unpaid caring roles are valued.

There were indications that unpaid care did not merely routinely fail to receive value in the Universal Credit system; it also incurred shame and exacerbated the stigma that lone mothers in particular face:

It's awful because there's still a massive stigma attached to being a single parent, even though it is more prevalent now, and there's an even bigger stigma attached to being a single parent who doesn't work for whatever reason and I think they absolutely have to take into account that if you're not working as a single parent you're not just sat on, some parents do sit on their backsides all day smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and all the rest, but others don't. *(P18, lone mother, two children aged fourteen and seven, wave two)*

I think that it's sort of you're looked down on to be honest. *(P10, lone mother, one child aged ten, wave one)*

You don't feel good when you're a single mum on Universal Credit. It's... almost like I say like frowned upon. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen, wave two)*

The mother quoted directly above highly valued her role as a mother but found this sense of pride in what she had achieved difficult to sustain when receiving a strong impression from the Universal Credit system that her unpaid caring role was not valued and was "almost something to be embarrassed of":

You know I try to be positive about it and think you're right I am a mum and I've achieved all this and I have got these skills and I could put them to good use and then they just kind of pop your bubble and you think well yeah, I am just a mum really when you should be celebrating it. But yeah, they don't really encourage, you know you don't feel like you've achieved something. If you'd've gone on a course and done all these skills then you know you get certificates and stuff but because you've earned them through being a mum it's like well so what? *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen, wave two)*

Overall, these findings reinforce prior research which also found that mothers felt their unpaid caring roles were devalued within conditionality policies and objected to this (Johnsen, 2016; Patrick, 2014). These findings also indicate that welfare-to-work policies play a part in constituting mothers' identities (Pulkingham, Fuller and

Kershaw, 2010). The current attempted shift to the adult worker model has been criticised for seeking to change mothers' gendered identities from carers to workers despite the importance some mothers attach to their caring identities (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016). Similarly, Wright (2012) argues that welfare-to-work policies, through stigmatising those who are not in paid work, crowd out activities that are central to some mothers' identities. These criticisms were reflected in the findings which show that caring roles important to the mothers' identities were devalued—and in some cases stigmatised—within a system that almost exclusively prioritised paid work. This caused considerable discomfort for the mothers as they were subject to a conditionality regime that was at odds with their values. While many of the mothers resented the devaluing of the unpaid care they provided, there were indications that a strong motherhood identity could be difficult to maintain in the face of the heavy emphasis on paid work and the compulsion within the Universal Credit conditionality regime.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit significantly affects women's roles and responsibilities regarding unpaid care. The main effects on the mothers' caring responsibilities included limiting time to undertake caring responsibilities, increasing tensions in interactions with children and experiencing difficulties in taking children to the JCP, therefore reducing the quality of care the mothers were able to provide. The longitudinal aspect of the study showed that the impacts were sustained over time and were often exacerbated by entrance into paid work, particularly for working class mothers. Some of the women also experienced shame and stigma on account of undertaking unpaid care and there were indications that women's caring identities may be eroded by the implementation of conditionality. Significantly, the mothers who had an easement in their work-related requirements were more likely to consider their caring responsibilities had been taken into account during the formation of the Claimant Commitment and to state at the first wave of interviews that their caring responsibilities had not been affected by their work-related requirements. For some mothers, having a work coach who had an understanding of caring responsibilities mediated some of the negative practical and emotional effects of the work-related

requirements on mothers' caring responsibilities. However, on the whole the work coaches had a limited impact on the most salient aspects of the work-related requirements and their subsequent impacts. The evidence presented demonstrates that the negative impacts on caring responsibilities were derived from the almost exclusive emphasis within the Universal Credit conditionality regime on paid work alongside a failure to recognise and take into account caring responsibilities throughout the participants' Universal Credit claims.

The emphasis on paid work within current welfare policy fails to acknowledge the negative impacts of paid work such as those evidenced in this study. It also does not recognise the positive impacts of carrying out unpaid care experienced by mothers (Richards-Gray, 2020) and their children nor the relational values care entails. This undermines the paternalist argument for conditionality which justifies compelling people to undertake paid work on the grounds that it is in their best interests (Watts et al., 2014). As Whitworth and Griggs explain, the argument that paid work enhances well-being regardless of its capacity to negatively impact mothers' ability to provide unpaid care is "highly partial" (2013, p.135). Additionally, paternalism problematically involves the government imposing its values (particularly the conception of the primacy of paid work) onto claimants regardless of whether they share those values (Goodin, 2001). While the majority of the study's participants did want to undertake paid work (see Chapter 6.2), for the most part, they considered unpaid care to be their primary responsibility, revealing a mismatch in priorities between government policy and the participants' lives.

The findings suggest there are broader implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's citizenship roles and responsibilities in respect of unpaid care and paid work. While unpaid care has not historically been comprehensively valued in citizenship frameworks, there has been some recognition of caring responsibilities within the United Kingdom's benefit system: formerly mothers could claim unconditional benefits on the basis of their unpaid caring responsibilities (Davies, 2015; Daly, 2011). The increasing application of conditionality over the past twenty years, which has culminated in the intensified and expanded conditionality under Universal Credit, removes this recognition and subsequently hinders, rather than promotes, the recognition of unpaid care as a valid

citizenship contribution. By failing to recognise unpaid care, conditionality furthers the conception of paid work as the primary duty of the responsible citizen (Patrick, 2012b), a notion that is highly gendered given women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care. As evidenced in this study, this is a responsibility that many women, and lone mothers in particular, need to undertake (Davies, 2015; Lewis, 2002), particularly in situations where there is no contact with the father nor help available from family and friends. This failure to value unpaid care as an essential societal contribution does not recognise interdependency and instead reinforces the contested gendered dichotomy between the 'independent' paid worker and the 'dependent' welfare recipient. The next chapter considers the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for mothers' employment trajectories, and subsequently the extent to which conditionality helps them to obtain economic independence, and therefore citizenship status, through paid work.

Chapter 6: The implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's position in the paid labour market

6.1 Introduction

While women have entered the paid labour force in significant numbers since the 1970s, they have mainly obtained part-time jobs and remain primarily responsible for unpaid care (Neitzert, 2020; Boyer et al., 2017; Lewis, 2009). Therefore, despite women's increasing participation in the paid labour market, women's citizenship status remains precarious within the current gendered citizenship framework (Lister, 2003) (see Chapter 2.2.1). The predominant feminist approach to improving women's citizenship status has been to encourage women's full participation in the paid labour market (Jensen and Møberg, 2017). While there are disadvantages to this approach (for example, it may result in the continued failure to recognise the value and necessity of unpaid care), it does recognise the importance of paid work to women's economic security and independence throughout the life course (see Chapter 2.2.2).

Conditionality may initially appear to improve women's participation in the paid labour market and therefore their citizenship status; however, there are concerns that the application of conditionality to mothers exacerbates women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011; MacLeavy, 2011; Grabham and Smith, 2010; Grover, 2007; MacLeavy, 2007). A key concern in relation to women's position in the paid labour market is the lack of consideration within conditionality policies of existing gender inequalities in the paid labour market and the related gendered division of unpaid care which can constrain and complicate women's participation in paid work (Davies, 2015; Bennett and Daly, 2014; Ingold and Etherington, 2013; MacLeavy, 2011). Therefore, whether the conditionality within Universal Credit improves or hinders women's citizenship status depends on the effects of the conditionality on their employment trajectories. To investigate the conditionality within Universal Credit in light of the above concerns, this chapter addresses the following research question:

How does the conditionality for lead carers within Universal Credit affect mothers' employment trajectories in respect of whether they obtain and sustain paid work and the types of paid work they obtain?

Sections 6.2 and 6.3 describe the participants' paid work aspirations and barriers to paid work respectively. Section 6.4 explores the formal childcare provision within Universal Credit and Section 6.5 investigates the employment-related support the participants received in obtaining paid work. Section 6.6 details the participants' experiences of trying to meet the work-related requirements of Universal Credit and Section 6.7 discusses the effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit on the participants' employment and earnings over time.

6.2. The participants' paid work aspirations

A key assumption underlying the implementation of conditionality is that benefit claimants prefer to receive their income in the form of social security benefits rather than earnings and therefore need to be motivated through the threat of sanction to undertake paid work (see Chapter 2.3.2). References to this perceived culture of "worklessness" and "welfare dependency" are found in the Universal Credit government literature (DWP, 2014a, 2010b, 2010c) and the government has argued that there is a need to reinforce "pro-work social norms" (DWP, 2010c, p.59). Contrary to this narrative, over the course of the study, all of the mothers expressed the desire to enter paid work either in the present or near future:

I'll work...I don't want to be stuck at home. I don't think any single parent does because oh my God it makes you mental. *(P24, lone mother, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two)*

I could go to work now an obviously she'd still get the [childcare] hours so I'm not shooting myself totally in the foot {both laugh}. I probably am in the long run but it's something I feel like I have to do for her, obviously she needs, kids need a lot. *(P4, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one)*

While some of the mothers did not want to enter paid work immediately on account of their caring responsibilities or studies and there was variation in the amount of hours the mothers wanted to work (discussed further in Chapter 7.2), the overwhelming majority of the mothers had specific paid work aspirations. There were variations in these aspirations according to education level. For example, the more highly educated mothers often reported they wanted professional, well-remunerated self-employed work or employed work (for example, copy editing or social work). The mothers with fewer qualifications tended to state that they wanted lower-paid, more gendered jobs such as paid care work or receptionist work. However, some of these mothers explained they did not want just any job and that they would like to train for a job that would result in higher earnings and a career:

I need good job because when I go to college and university I'm going to have good job...They give you cleaning you see but I need good job. And make my children happy. If I have good job I'm going to make them happy but if like I have like cleaning I don't have enough money to make them happy. (*P13, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one*)

I don't just want to go back into a job that I don't enjoy. I want to get some training behind me, like better myself. Make sure that I'm going to do a good job before I actually do go into a job. (*P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one*)

Several of the other mothers also expressed a desire to undertake training before entering paid work. However, at the second wave of interviews fewer mothers stated they wanted to undertake training. The longitudinal aspect of the study also demonstrated that while the mothers remained committed to obtaining paid work over time, some of the mothers became less sure of what they wanted to do or lowered their paid work aspirations. Of concern, some of these mothers were not given support in balancing paid work and unpaid care or negotiating paid work while having a health condition and this resulted in a re-evaluation and lowering of paid-work aspirations. One mother who had an art degree but struggled to find paid work due to both her health condition and the difficulties she experienced in accessing the formal childcare provision within Universal Credit explained:

I've come down a peg or two. When you came I was like saying about how I wanted to have my own business. I wanted to do this job and I wanted to be an artist and do the commissions and I wanted to have a job that was meaningful and constructive and I could be my own boss and be up, you know tick a higher box and actually I've not been able to do that and it's brought me down a peg or two and now I've applying, thinking of applying, planning to apply for a job in a factory. (*P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave two*)

Overall, the analysis shows that the assumption that claimants are unmotivated to undertake paid work and therefore need to be coerced into employment is flawed as the mothers were motivated to enter paid work and had specific paid-work aspirations (cf. Wright and Patrick, 2019). In line with previous research (Treanor, 2017), these aspirations were influenced—and sometimes constrained—by current circumstances, experiences, skills, knowledge and education. There were indications from the current study that for some mothers, over time, Universal Credit operated as a constraint on the mothers' aspirations due to the 'work-first' approach (which demands claimants enter the first available job and limits opportunities for training) inherent within the conditionality regime and through the lack of support to assist people into paid work (discussed in Sections 6.4 and 6.5 below).

6.3. Barriers to paid work

The assumption that benefit claimants lack motivation to undertake paid work not only places the blame for unemployment on individuals but also diverts attention from structural and personal barriers to unemployment (Friedli and Stearn, 2015; Wright, 2012; Deacon and Patrick, 2011) (see Chapter 2.3.3). In this study, the participants highlighted multiple barriers to paid work as shown in Table 6 on the next page.

Table 6 Participants' barriers to paid work

Participant	Childcare issues	Incompatibilities between available jobs and formal childcare provision	Lack of part-time jobs	Lack of jobs in the local area	Age	Lack of qualifications	Lack of work experience	Lack of skills	Lack of confidence	Lack of transport	Health conditions
1											
2											
3											
4											
5											
6											
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9											
10											
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19											
20											
21											
22											
23											
24											

As the table shows, a key barrier to paid work faced by the overwhelming majority of the mothers concerned childcare:

This nursery has no foot space on the days that she's not there and even if they did it's...three hundred quid a month just on that nursery fee so I don't have that spare. (P4, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one)

It's been quite a challenge actually trying to find somebody who can still regularly look after [youngest child] and so yeah the way the school aftercare's set up is that it's only on a Monday and a Wednesday. *(P12, coupled mother, two children aged fifteen and six, wave one)*

As the above comments indicate, for many of the mothers there was a lack of childcare available (whether formal or informal). This was particularly acute during school holidays. Some of the other mothers also mentioned the prohibitive cost of childcare, even with the extra government provision (discussed further in Section 6.4).

An issue raised by many of the mothers was the incompatibility between available jobs, which often required flexible working or non-standard hours, and the hours of formal childcare provision. Many mothers spoke of the impracticalities of carrying out jobs that require early morning, evening and weekend work given the unavailability of formal childcare provision at these times:

Before I had [child] I used to work like half past seven in the morning till like one or three or five. So I'm not going to get childcare for half past seven in the morning unless I do like the evening shifts but even some of them are like three till ten so there again it doesn't quite fit in. Obviously I can't really do nights cos they're like seven till seven and who's going to watch her at seven on a night? *(P4, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one)*

I have no evening or weekend childcare provision. The nurseries shut bang on six. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

This finding points to the difficulties mothers face when trying to enter a gendered paid labour market that operates on the assumption that workers are unrestricted by caring responsibilities (Conaghan, 2009). It also shows that the changing paid labour market which involves demand for flexible workers and an increase in jobs of non-standard hours has exacerbated these difficulties (Cain, 2016). Additionally, it demonstrates that formal childcare provision can only facilitate entrance into paid

work to a limited extent given the mismatch between the hours of formal childcare provision and the hours of paid work (Javornik and Ingold, 2015).

Similarly, the participants also spoke of a lack of jobs in the local area and a lack of jobs of the hours stipulated by the Universal Credit regulations.

There's not that many jobs in this area. As I say there's [nearby area] up there but it's very rare that they have jobs opening. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen, wave one)*

It's finding a job because a lot of jobs are zero contract, they're sixteen hours or they're thirty hours...there isn't a job that says twenty-five hours only. *(P24, lone mother, three children aged twelve, ten and five, wave one)*

Therefore, for some mothers, the paid work expectations of Universal Credit may be unrealistic given the availability of jobs, particularly part-time jobs. Research conducted by the lone parent charity Gingerbread (Dewar and Ben-Galim, 2017) investigating the conditionality within Universal Credit for parents of three and four year olds similarly found that there is a lack of part-time jobs. Therefore the charity has argued that conditionality requirements should be suspended until appropriate jobs (and also sufficient formal childcare) are in place.

A further set of factors identified by the participants related to their cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Such factors commonly highlighted by the participants were lack of qualifications, skills, work experience and confidence. For some of the participants, time spent outside of the paid labour market on account of caring for their children resulted in lowered confidence and others felt they would be disadvantaged by their lack of recent employment experience:

Since having my children I've lost a lot of my confidence because I don't know, you just kind of like stay in your own little circle. *(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one)*

I've had that work gap so people are probably thinking well you know yeah she has brought up her family but still we want somebody who's been working you know continuously. *(P8, lone mother, two children aged thirteen and eleven, wave two)*

Other research has found that time away from the paid labour market on account of caring responsibilities results in a loss of confidence and paid work experience, and an erosion of skills and qualifications (Grant, 2009). This illustrates that there is a gendered dimension to some of the barriers mothers face in re-entering paid work and that some mothers need specialist employment support (Fawcett Society, 2015; Graham and McQuaid, 2014).

Additionally, almost a third of the mothers had health conditions which made finding and sustaining paid work difficult:

So I've got lots of oomph and ideas and passion and then I'll just be like knocked, I'll not be able to function. So like whereas I might be able to do something for a period of time, then I'll just like crash and grind to a halt. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave two)*

Then I got very poorly. I was working in [clothes shop] as I was getting ill and then got sacked because I had too much time off and was late because I was so ill. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

While some of these mothers received an easement on account of their health conditions (see Chapter 5.3.1), they were still required to either prepare for or look for paid work. However, both their health conditions and the lack of jobs they could do made this very difficult. Approximately half of the mothers who identified health as a barrier to paid work did not have an easement in their work-related requirements, in some cases because they had not had discussions about their health conditions with their work coaches.

In line with previous research (Haux, 2012), many of the mothers faced multiple barriers to paid work. The research findings suggest that for some participants, the

combination of multiple barriers made finding paid work almost impossible, as one participant who had a health condition explained:

I'm limited as to what I can do job wise and you go on Indeed and you know three thousand jobs but then you refine it so it's like ten hours and then within a ten mile radius and then there's only admin and reception kind of work but the majority of them you need to have previous experience in it and even though I've worked in customer service all my life I've never been a receptionist. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen, wave two)*

Overall, the findings indicate that the unemployed status or low earnings of the mothers was due to the multiple and significant barriers to paid work they faced rather than individual problems with motivation or behaviour (cf. Johnsen, 2016; Graham and McQuaid, 2014; Patrick, 2011). Childcare was a particularly pertinent barrier faced by the mothers regardless of cultural capital and relationship status. The next section explores the extent to which the increased formal childcare provision within Universal Credit helped the mothers obtain paid work.

6.4 The Universal Credit childcare provision

Under Universal Credit there has been an increase in state assistance with formal childcare provision. Universal Credit claimants can claim back up to eighty-five percent of their childcare costs (DWP, 2020e), which is an increase from the seventy percent provided under WTCs. Childcare provision has also been expanded under Universal Credit through extending help with childcare costs to parents working fewer than sixteen hours per week (DWP, 2014b). However, the mothers who tried to access this provision invariably encountered difficulties (cf. Griffiths et al., 2020). A key problem was the lack of communication about the help with childcare costs within Universal Credit (cf. DWP, 2017b):

I don't know how to go about it and get you know that done you know I've asked but not got anywhere. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

So I don't know where I'm going to stand of how much they'll cover for me with our income. There's nobody that's discussed it with you. There's nobody that tells you if you get a job and you're on eight pound fifty an hour and you pay this much on childcare we'll give you this so much for your childcare and you'll be on this much from work. *(P20, coupled mother, two children aged four and two, wave one)*

Another common problem, as documented by charities (for example, McDonough, 2019; McKechnie, 2019), was the requirement to pay the first month of their formal childcare costs upfront. Under Universal Credit, parents are required to pay childcare costs themselves and report them retrospectively to the DWP each month (DWP, 2020c). They are then reimbursed in a subsequent Universal Credit payment. In response to concerns about this policy, the government has explained it has two measures in place (Budgeting Advances and the Flexible Support Fund⁷) to help claimants struggling with upfront childcare costs (DWP, 2018f). However, there was very limited awareness of these measures across the sample. Additionally, one participant found accessing the Flexible Support Fund very difficult as the staff at her local JCP were not knowledgeable about it (cf. Work and Pensions Committee, 2018b). As a result of problems paying the upfront costs, this participant's child was unable to continue attending nursery:

I ran out of all rope with them [the nursery] because they thought I wasn't paying cos I couldn't afford to pay the full four hundred and fifty for this particular company all at once...It meant that I couldn't do any of the summer school. I had no tenure, I had no lee-way to like say you know I'm good for the money because I clearly wasn't and I couldn't say you can rely on the Department of Work and Pensions, they're going to pay it. You can't say that. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave two)*

⁷ Budgeting Advances can be given to claimants to help them take up a job offer or increase their earnings. They are for people who have been claiming Universal Credit for at least six months and have had a low income, and are repaid through deductions made to future Universal Credit payments. The Flexible Support Fund is a discretionary fund that work coaches can allocate to help claimants overcome barriers to paid work (DWP, 2018f).

As the participant's child could no longer attend nursery, the participant was not able to carry out some paid work she had been commissioned to do and she had to take her child with her to a job interview. Some of the mothers said they were put off trying to find paid work or more paid work in part because of the requirement to pay childcare fees upfront. Others reported that paying the fees upfront resulted in financial hardship or debt.

The reimbursement of childcare costs was not just a problem at the start of the Universal Credit claim. One of the mothers entered paid work several months after making a claim for Universal Credit but found that she could not continue in her job due to the fact she was paid her childcare costs in arrears:

It wasn't really a sustainable thing for me to be doing because it cost more per hour for the childminder than I made per hour from the [company] and even though I could claim back some of that money it was after I'd already paid for it so I was just always out of pocket...so I ended up quitting the job because it just wasn't sustainable paying for the childcare. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three, wave one)*

While some of the mothers expressed appreciation of the extra help with childcare costs, a larger proportion of the mothers stated that even with this help, childcare remained unaffordable:

I had to put maybe fifty pound to it which I thought that's fair enough but fifty pound's a lot of money when you're a single parent. To me that's half a day's, well nearly a day's work. So sometimes it weighs up not to go to work. *(P19, lone parent, two children aged ten and seven, wave two)*

As noted in Section 6.3, while the cost of formal childcare was one barrier to paid work, there were other issues with formal childcare, such as unavailability and incompatibility with paid work hours, that prevented the mothers from entering paid work. A few of the participants mentioned that the assistance with formal childcare costs did not help given the unavailability of formal childcare provision:

They said to me about the eighty-five but the hardest thing for me is getting an actual childcare provider. (*P23, lone mother, two children aged seven and six, wave two*)

These findings show that increased assistance with childcare costs may not help mothers enter paid work if other childcare-related barriers are present. They also support the contention that childcare cannot be fully commodified from a practical as well as a relational standpoint (Lewis and Giullari, 2005; Fraser, 1998). This is problematic given that governments have turned to formal childcare provision in order to remove female “barriers” to employment (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). More broadly, this supports the claim that some women will always be disadvantaged in the paid labour market as all of women’s responsibility for unpaid care cannot be transferred to formal childcare provision (Fraser, 1998).

Overall, while the increased help with formal childcare costs was welcomed by some of the mothers, as a result of the various issues discussed, this measure did not help many of the mothers overcome the barrier childcare posed to entering paid work and for a couple of mothers, the delivery of this provision made paid work impossible to sustain (cf. Griffiths et al., 2020; McDonough, 2019; Work and Pensions Committee, 2018b). The next section discusses the extent of the employment-related support the mothers were given in overcoming other barriers to paid work.

6.5 Employment-related support

The government claims that under Universal Credit, claimants receive tailored support, principally delivered through work coaches (DWP, 2014a). The government aims to provide claimants with the same work coach throughout their Universal Credit claim so that a relationship can be built between the claimant and the work coach (DWP, 2014a). According to the government literature, work coaches have been trained to listen to claimants, and help them to think through their paid work aspirations and overcome barriers to paid work (DWP, 2014a). This section explores the limited extent to which these claims were realised in the mothers’ experiences of employment support.

6.5.1 Relationships with work coaches

For the most part, the mothers were positive about their work coaches. Fifteen of the twenty-four mothers had a positive relationship, two had a mixed relationship, five had a negative relationship and two had minimal contact with their work coaches. Those who had an easement tended to have particularly positive relationships with their work coaches. One of these mothers explained her work coach was:

Really understanding. She's been brilliant to be honest. Really, really brilliant. *(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one)*

Similarly, the middle class mothers tended to have positive relationships with their work coaches:

I've found them very friendly, I've found them very accommodating...I have not experienced anything so far negative or putting me down. *(P1, lone mother, two children aged eight and six)*

They were all like really supportive and were you know really kind and nice and stuff and I spent a lot of time crying because they just so nice. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three)*

These mothers attributed these positive relationships to their work coaches' personalities but also to their own proactiveness in attempting to obtain paid work and their friendly demeanours towards their work coaches.

The five mothers who had negative relationships with their work coaches were all working class. Two of these mothers explained:

She was horrible. I hate going in that place. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

I don't really like the staff in the JobCentre, like half of them, they're very pushy an they don't really listen. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

The above quotes imply that these participants felt they were treated with disrespect by their work coaches (cf. McLaren, Maury and Squire, 2018; Gray, 2017; Haux et al., 2012). This corresponds with wider academic research concerning class and gender which has found that working class women experience misrecognition and devaluing across a range of social spaces and face far greater struggles in obtaining respect whereas middle class women move across social spaces with much greater ease (Skeggs, 2011, 2004, 1997).

There were also variations as to whether the participants had the same work coach throughout their claim. While some of the participants had the same work coach, others saw different people throughout their claim:

Being passed from pillar to post. Nobody knows your circumstances so you have to explain it every time you go. *(P20, coupled mother, two children aged four and two, wave one)*

For some of the mothers, in addition to the lack of knowledge of their circumstances, the variation in work coaches led to different experiences in the interactions and levels of understanding they received:

I have had some that are not very nice...My particular work coach now's considered my life, how it's been an what work I've done and my son and things like that. *(P10, lone mother, one child aged ten, wave one)*

The longitudinal aspect of the study showed that the variation in work coaches continued over time and that there was a significant change for four of the participants. At the second wave of interviews, these participants had been moved to what they termed a 'virtual' system wherein they had a different work coach who communicated with them solely online. One participant who had experienced domestic abuse explained at the first and second wave of interviews respectively:

(Wave One) She's lovely, she'll just say, "You know you're with me and you don't have to worry."

(Wave Two) But then I've got this new coach so things might change and they're not seeing me and it's a bit once removed isn't it, when they don't know you. Whereas my coach did know me from the beginning and she understands it. Whereas this one I'm just a number on an email I suppose...just less personal. *(P8, lone mother, two children aged thirteen and eleven)*

As this comment indicates, the new virtual system appears to undermine the relationship between claimants and work coaches. This is concerning as the work coach relationship can make a substantial difference to a claimant's experience of Universal Credit. For example, four of the participants stated they had a positive experience of Universal Credit. Three of these mothers attributed this to their work coaches and a further mother explained it was due to both her efforts to maintain her Universal Credit claim and the JCP and helpline staff. Previous research has also highlighted the importance to lone mothers of the character and consistency of the relationship between JCP advisers and claimants (Graham and McQuaid, 2014; Haux et al., 2012). Therefore, while the prevalence of participants in the current study who had a good relationship with their work coach is positive, concerns remain for those who had negative relationships, those who had a number of different work coaches and those within the virtual system.

6.5.2 Support, training and advice provided by work coaches and the JobCentre Plus

Despite the majority of the participants stating they had a good relationship with their work coaches, the majority of the participants also stated they did not receive any support, advice or training from their work coaches or the JCP in relation to finding paid work in contrast to the government literature (DWP, 2014a). On occasions, support was not provided even when participants asked for it:

An I did ring up about the lollipop lady [job] cos I thought I could do that and I rang I think the JobCentre up and they said, "Oh you need to ring the council

for that,” and put the phone down. I was like oh right, that was a quick call, okay. Yeah so I didn’t bother applying for it in the end. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

I did ask like was there like courses I could go on about like how to do your taxes or like more information about being self-employed... but when I asked this guy he was like, “Well there is a private firm we can refer you to,” and then that’s all he said and I was like well I don’t really know what that is and that doesn’t sound very helpful like or he wasn’t making it sound very like something he wanted to talk about so there wasn’t any but if there were more resources I would definitely like taken up on that. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

The lack of employment-related support for self-employment evidenced in the quote above was prevalent throughout the group of self-employed mothers in the sample: all apart from one of these mothers likewise commented on the lack of support they received in setting up or growing their businesses.

A minority of the participants received a limited amount of support and training, for example they received help with writing or updating their CVs or had been told about training courses and support provided by external agencies. Five of the mothers had been informed of local jobs fairs: attendance was mandatory for some of these mothers and optional for others. While some of the mothers found the assistance with CV writing helpful and three were signposted to external agencies and courses that were beneficial, a larger proportion of the sample found the support offered was too basic or unhelpful:

One time a woman who worked there was on about something else that I could do to try and get into the work I think with like a group of people and you talk and I don’t know. I wasn’t really up for that...I don’t like doing that sort of stuff like...I don’t need to sit in a group an discuss that. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

Only one participant reported that she had received substantial support and training in obtaining paid work. This participant's work coach pointed her towards job vacancies that were compatible with her work experience and caring responsibilities and she also attended a helpful course provided by the JCP.

The longitudinal element of the study showed that over time, there was very little change in the amount of support, advice and training the participants were given. One of the participants who faced multiple barriers in obtaining paid work yet was very keen to get a job explained at the two waves of interviews:

(Wave One) She just kind of leaves it all to me and then wants me to report back to her...so it's just kind of look for work, look for work, look for work...You know she doesn't bring anything up on the computer and say oh well that might be good for you.

(Wave Two) There needs to be more support, more help, instead of just telling us what we have to do. You know, how can we help you. Just more of that.
(P21, lone parent, one child aged fourteen)

The participants with experience of the new virtual system found the support they received decreased. Rather than have a work search review appointment with a work coach, these mothers had to complete an online task (for example, one participant was required to answer a series of questions including 'Can you tell me a time you changed your priorities to meet a deadline?'). The mothers reported they received either no or minimal feedback on their completed tasks.

Over the two waves of interviews, many of the mothers explained that their meetings with their work coaches were mainly concerned with checking that they had fulfilled their mandatory requirements:

I think she was to check things and just update the computer kind of thing rather than any kind of careers advice. *(P17, lone parent, two children aged six and four, wave one)*.

They ask you what you're doing. They don't give you any help bar asking what you're doing and they're ticking a box. *(P24, lone parent, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two).*

These findings which show that little meaningful support was given to the claimants and that there was an emphasis on surveillance rather than support correspond with much prior research on conditionality in the UK (Dwyer, 2018a; Patrick, 2017; Haux et al., 2012; Whitworth, 2012). The government has stated that under Universal Credit there is an increase in support in finding paid work which is provided in return for increased paid work expectations (DWP, 2014a). However, this study shows that while the work-related requirements have increased, the levels of employment-related support have not. The analysis suggests that the onus is on the claimant to find paid work under the threat of sanction for non-compliance, and thus as well as individualising the 'problem' of unemployment, the government is also individualising the 'solution', regardless of the barriers claimants face in obtaining paid work.

6.5.3 Support for long-term paid work aspirations

As noted in Section 6.2, the overwhelming majority of the mothers had specific paid work aspirations. However, contrary to the government literature (DWP, 2014a), for the most part, the work coaches did not ask the participants about their paid work aspirations. In response to a question regarding whether her work coach had asked about her paid work aspirations, one participant answered:

No, no, no, no that's silly, that would be a sensible question to ask {both laugh}. Because if they asked that question to everybody then they could actually work out an actual plan of how to get that person to that point instead of forcing them out every week to apply for jobs that they don't want and that they'll have absolutely no intention of working their best at if it's a rubbish job. *(P18, lone parent, two children aged fourteen and seven, wave two)*

Some of the participants were asked about their paid work aspirations but only at the beginning of their claims. While others reported they informed their work coaches of their paid work aspirations, there was little evidence that the work coaches supported

the mothers in achieving these aspirations and at times the work coaches appear to have disregarded them. For example, one participant aspired to be a chef; however, despite having told her work coach of this aim, she was not given any support in working towards it and instead was mandated to apply for a job in a newsagent. Similarly, when other participants were either directed towards or encouraged to enter particular jobs, they tended to be gendered, low-status, low-paid, insecure jobs in areas such as paid care work, childminding, hairdressing, fast-food and retail (Ingold and Etherington, 2013; Grant, 2009; Smith et al., 2008). As one participant explained:

When I said that I was registering as a childminder they said that that was really good cos that was one of the things they were meant to steer people towards, was childminding cos there's not enough childminders. So they were like, "Good, we can tick that box, there's another childminder." (*P3, lone parent, two children aged six and three, wave two*)

This participant had a master's degree and therefore was being encouraged into work that she was overqualified for. Additionally, the unequivocal support for pursuing self-employment demonstrated here was evident among other members of the sample and is problematic given the low social protection that accompanies this work (Caraher and Reuter, 2019; Watson and Pearson, 2016) and the difficulties the mothers encountered with Universal Credit's policies for the self-employed (discussed in Section 6.6).

Additionally, while there was some support for short-term training, those who either wanted to undertake more substantial training or who were already undertaking degrees encountered difficulties. A central issue was the requirement to undertake paid work alongside training and education. This deterred some of the mothers from embarking on obtaining qualifications. It also had negative impacts on those who were already studying as it made working towards qualifications less sustainable due to triple responsibilities of work-related requirements, studying and unpaid care. One of the mothers who was undertaking a part-time degree expressed frustration at both waves of interviews at the requirement to undertake paid work as it was detrimental

to her studies, which she felt were important to her family's long-term financial situation:

(Wave One) Cos that's the one that's having to take more of a back bench I'd say which is not ideal is it cos that's the thing that I really really need for our futures to be concentrating on.

(Wave Two) I don't think they take into consideration what it is for me to be able to do that [paid work] and if I was just staying at home and not doing anything else I could understand but I am studying to try and better myself anyway. It's not like I'm sitting at home and doing nothing. I am still caring for my children and I'm studying as well. *(P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and ten)*

Between the two waves of interviews, the participant had to take some time out of her studies as she was overburdened by her triple responsibilities. Other research has also found that subjecting mothers to welfare conditionality limits their opportunities for training and education (Ingold and Etherington, 2013; Haux et al., 2012). This is problematic given the importance of training and education to women's ability to enter paid work and to their long-term earnings (Dorsett, Lui and Weale, 2011).

Some of the mothers explicitly expressed the view that Universal Credit does not support the achievement of long-term career aspirations:

I think the JobCentre's not really interested in the long-term. I think they are quite short-term. So I've not really discussed it [work aspirations] at any length cos I think they'd rather you were just in any form of work rather than thinking about what career do you want in however long time. *(P16, lone parent, one child aged four, wave two)*

I think it's not supported me in terms of thinking what the best thing to do career-wise is. It's made me, and it's probably the same for a lot of people, think gosh quick what can I do because immediately you have these

requirements and you're thinking ooh what is it that I can do to earn money so you're maybe not thinking about the best thing to do or the most long-term plan. It's a very now, now {bangs table} thing and in a sense the idea is that any paid work is better than no paid work whether that's relevant for your skills or for long-term or fitting round the kids. So I don't think it's supportive of longer-term aspirations. *(P2, lone parent, two children aged nine and seven, wave two)*

Overall, the analysis shows that while many of the participants were positive about their work coaches and for some the positive relationship made a substantial difference to their experience of claiming Universal Credit, on the whole the work coaches did not provide the participants with adequate support in obtaining paid work. Previous research has also found that not only is there little support offered from the JCP for helping claimants obtain paid work but that the demands of conditionality can hinder realisation of long-term paid work aspirations (Patrick, 2017). This study contributes to concerns about the 'work-first' approach and also shows the gendered issues of this approach. As women occupy a disadvantaged position in the paid labour market and mothers in particular are more likely to undertake low-paid work (Reis, 2018), they especially need to be supported into obtaining long-term, sustainable, adequately-paid work. However, the 'work-first' approach emphasises getting claimants into paid work at the first opportunity and therefore may further women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market through failing to support women to achieve their long-term paid work aspirations.

6.6 Experiences of meeting work-related requirements

The lack of support discussed above is particularly problematic given the overwhelming majority of the mothers faced difficulties in meeting the work-related requirements attached to their Universal Credit claim. The mothers encountered a variety of challenges. A common issue was the difficulty of carrying out work-related requirements as well as caring responsibilities:

He's [her son] engaging in conversation with me and I'm breaking off and again you know it doesn't work. It just doesn't work really. You can't focus on

what you're doing, you've got one eye on your children or you're getting interrupted every two minutes: "Can I have a drink, can I have this?" and you just think oh I give up. (*P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one*)

For some of the mothers, carrying out work-related requirements during school holidays was particularly difficult as they did not receive a reduction in requirements over the holidays and many did not have childcare as only those undertaking paid work are eligible for help with childcare costs (DWP, 2020c) One participant explained that during the school holidays:

I did it on a night time when kids were in bed cos otherwise it weren't possible. It's unless you have like a quick you know when you're on the toilet {both laugh} searching on your phone or any spare time that you do get then you need to do it then otherwise it yeah it's quite difficult cos your kids are always: "Mum I need this, Mum I need that, Mum can we do this?" (*P22, lone parent, two children aged seven and five, wave two*)

These findings demonstrate that the lack of recognition of caring responsibilities when the Claimant Commitment was formed and during ongoing interactions with work coaches (see Chapter 5.3) not only negatively impacted the mothers' caring responsibilities, but also their ability to carry out work-related requirements. This reflects criticisms that conditionality policies fail to account for the gendered division of labour and do not recognise how this can create difficulties for mothers in engaging in the paid labour market (Davies, 2015; Bennett and Daly, 2014; Ingold and Etherington, 2013; MacLeavy, 2011).

For the most part, the coupled mothers had additional responsibility for fulfilling work-related requirements. All but one of the seven mothers with experience of a joint claim helped their partners with their work-related commitments, for example, by looking for jobs and reporting job search activity, or ensuring they fulfilled certain mandatory tasks:

He was a little bit useless. I filled in his job search for him. *(P23, lone mother, two children, aged seven and six, wave one)*

I can see on the page if we need to go, like go to the JobCentre, if we need to do something. So I'll get a text and it'll tell me something's up there and then I'll check it and if he needs to do something I'll be like, "Do it, do it right now, do it straight away, don't leave it, do it." *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

The coupled mothers helped their partners with their work-related requirements to avoid a sanction because the whole family is likely to be impacted if one member of the couple receives a sanction, due to the single payment into one account (Millar and Bennett, 2017). As one of the mothers pointed out, as her partner was receiving an income of £800 a month from his job and she was receiving the Universal Credit payment, had a sanction been issued due to failure on his part to fulfil a requirement, her income, and not his, would have been reduced. The one coupled mother who did not help her partner with his mandatory requirements at the start of the change from a single claim to a joint claim ended up having her Universal Credit claim closed:

Where it fell down was the boyfriend didn't go to a key appointment that he was supposed to have gone to and the next I heard about that was just a message in on my phone you just get a message saying: "Your Universal Credit claim has closed"...So I felt really pissed off because at that point I very much still felt like well it's my money, it's my claim. Yes we've moved in together but this is still for me and my son and he messed it up. *(P14, lone parent, one child aged eight, wave two)*

This demonstrates one highly problematic aspect of the joint claim wherein one partner can lose access to social security provision due to the behaviour of the other. While research commissioned by the DWP has reported that Universal Credit "has been encouraging more collaborative job searching" among some couples (DWP, 2017, p.61), this study, in line with previous research (Andersen, 2019), shows that such collaboration can be highly gendered as the women helped the men with their

work-related requirements. Research conducted by Griffiths et al. (2020) has similarly found that female partners tend to take on more responsibility for managing the Universal Credit online claim. The additional responsibility women undertake for fulfilling work-related requirements and managing the online claim furthers the gendered imbalance in unpaid labour that coupled mothers experience.

Some mothers found the extent of the job search itself unrealistic due to the number of hours required and also the lack of available suitable jobs (cf. Wright, Fletcher and Stewart, 2020; Wright and Patrick, 2019):

Thirty hours actually is quite impossible where there's only so many websites that are available, there are only so many jobs that fit the criteria. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and five, wave two)*

Yeah, [job searching is] not very easy...because there's a lot of women out there looking for part-time jobs which are the sixteen hours which are after drop-off then it's just a lot more difficult because I think there's a massive demand for those jobs but there's not enough suppliers. *(P11, lone parent, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

In addition to finding the job search itself challenging, some mothers also struggled to report their job search on their online journal or fulfil administrative tasks. This was due to factors such as lack of access to the internet or a computer, learning disabilities and lack of English proficiency:

I find it quite hard to keep a track on which jobs I've, how many jobs I've applied for...I've been finding it especially on my phone to then type it up onto cos you have to put each job that you've been applying for. *(P10, lone mother, one child aged ten, wave one)*

If you don't know computer you know online and stuff like that it's really difficult. I find it difficult cos I'm dyslexic so you know that's even worse. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

Sometimes I mix French and English to write, you see is difficult...I was tell them I can't. They say I have to trying to write it because if I will not write it and I looking for job and they're going to cut my money too. (*P13, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave two*)

This finding corresponds with concerns that government-imposed administrative tasks are particularly likely to negatively affect those with lower financial resources and human capital (Moynihan, Herd and Harvey, 2015). This inequality in ability to meet administrative tasks is very problematic under Universal Credit given that claimants face sanctions for failing to report their job search on their Universal Credit online journal and can face reductions or complete withdrawal of payments for failing to carry out other online tasks such as reporting a variety of changes straight away (HMG, 2020). Additionally, those in paid employment still face the possibility of being sanctioned (even if they are not subject to requirements to increase their earnings) due to the administration required in maintaining Universal Credit claims. While the government has explained that the online system is intended to increase claimants' responsibility for their claims and help them learn digital skills to help them both search for, and acquire, jobs (DWP, 2015b, 2012a), this study suggests the online administration can significantly add to the hard work involved in claiming UK benefits (cf. Griffiths et al., 2020; Patrick, 2017) and may negatively impact some groups of claimants more than others.

At the second wave of interviews, the mothers who were still subject to job search requirements reported that difficulties with meeting these requirements were ongoing and in some cases had increased due to the prolonged length of time they had spent job searching. For example, one participant who had to job search for ten hours a week continued to experience difficulties given the lack of available jobs and the amount of time she was required to job search for each week. Her comments indicate that over time, meeting job search requirements become more difficult as she could not repeatedly apply for the same jobs:

(*Wave One*) It's pretty difficult...there's only the reception work, admin and cashier, that narrows it down...you can't realistically you can't spend ten hours looking for three specific type of jobs.

(Wave Two) Obviously I'm restricted as to what jobs I can look for and they're very limited, part-time hours for the kind of jobs that I'm applying for. And they're few and far between so I'm struggling to meet the ten hour deadline... you're left with about twenty jobs that you can apply for and then you've got to do another ten hours search the next week and it's still the same twenty jobs and they don't change so you know what am I supposed to do? I can't apply for the same job every single week cos I think the employer would get a bit peeved off. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen)*

For many of the self-employed mothers, the challenges of meeting work-related expectations had increased at the second wave of interviews as they were no longer in their start-up year and were now subject to the MIF (see Chapter 3.2.3).

Regardless of educational levels and professions, none of the self-employed mothers were consistently meeting this threshold. Various reasons were given for this including difficulties in carrying out self-employed work during school holidays, the inadequacy of the one year start-up period to establish and grow their businesses, and fluctuations in pay. Additionally, many of the mothers found they had to work many hours in order to meet the MIF due to the low pay they received and the type of their work:

I said to them as well like I work a lot more than twenty-five hours. I probably work about sixty hours a week so I can pay enough for the business expenses and pay myself a wage. So it's not like I'm not working. *(P12, lone mother, two children aged fourteen and six, wave two)*.

I think that back when I first was planning to be a childminder and thought like oh no problem, I can work two days a week with two kids a day, that will fit right into everything else we're already doing. I think I was quite optimistic about that and then of course the reality is of being a childminder is that you know kids all come on different days and parents are always changing what you know what they need...I do have to work basically twice as much as my requirement. *(P3, lone parent, two children aged six and three, wave two)*

As Caraher and Reuter (2019) have argued, in light of the increased likelihood of the self-employed having fluctuating earnings and the newly self-employed having lower earnings, the MIF along with the inadequacy of the start-up period is likely to exacerbate the material precarity of the self-employed. This study indicates there is a gendered dimension to these issues. The MIF is applied continuously and there are no exemptions for periods of the year such as the school holidays when mothers are less able to undertake self-employed work. It does not recognise the low pay of much typically gendered self-employed work (such as paid care work and cleaning). In addition, while mothers with a child under the age of thirteen are subject to expectations of part-time paid work on account of their caring responsibilities, they are not given an extended start-up period to compensate for the fact they may have less hours available in the first year to establish and grow their businesses.

Overall, the analysis shows that many of the participants faced multiple challenges in meeting their work-related requirements in part due to the insufficient recognition of caring responsibilities within the Universal Credit conditionality regime. The longitudinal aspect of the study showed that over time, difficulties in meeting work-related requirements continued and in some cases increased. Some of those subject to job search requirements faced difficulties in carrying out long-term job search activity due to the ongoing lack of availability of appropriate jobs and infeasibility of applying for the same jobs. The self-employed mothers universally faced increased difficulties in meeting work-related requirements due to the application of the MIF after the initial one year start-up period. As the mothers found meeting the work-related requirements difficult—and at times impossible—to fulfil, the conditionality may be of limited efficacy in moving the mothers into paid work or helping them increase their earnings. The next section details the changes (or absences thereof) in employment and earnings over the course of the study.

6.7 The effects of conditionality on employment and earnings

The government has stated in relation to gender that the conditionality within Universal Credit “presents an opportunity to promote equality in work and narrow the employment gap” (DWP, 2012c, p.42). However, there are concerns that the conditionality within Universal Credit will exacerbate women's unequal position in the

paid labour market (MacLeavy, 2011). Charities have highlighted the problematic combination of women's predominance in low-paid, insecure work and the emphasis in Universal Credit on moving people into any type of work at the first opportunity (Fawcett Society, 2015; Gingerbread, 2015b). In this study, the requirement to take 'any work' was stipulated on the participants' Claimant Commitments and was also reiterated by several of their work coaches. This section explores the mothers' employment trajectories and their views on whether Universal Credit helped move them closer to paid work.

6.7.1 Job entry, types, progression and maintenance

At the first wave of interviews, three of the twenty-four participants had moved into, and remained in, paid jobs since the start of their Universal Credit claim, a further two had entered self-employment and one had had a series of temporary jobs. Six of the other participants were already employed or self-employed at the start of their Universal Credit claim. Table 7 on the next page shows the participants' work status at the first and second waves of interviews.

Table 7 Changes in employment between the two waves of interviews

Participant	Wave 1	Wave 2
1	Self-employed carer/cleaner, complementary therapist, product salesperson	Employed 24 hours a week in administration at a school A limited amount of complementary therapies and product sales
2	Self-employed writer/copy writer	Self-employed writer/copy writer Increase in earnings some months but not meeting the MIF on a consistent basis
3	Self-employed child minder	Self-employed childminder Increase in earnings but not meeting the MIF on a consistent basis
4	Unemployed	N/A
5	Recently undertook temporary work doing head counts, about to undertake Christmas period temporary work.	Employed 21 hours a week in sales (temporary)
6	Employed 20 hours a week as a cleaner.	Employed 20 hours a week as a cleaner Slight hourly-pay increase
7	Unemployed	N/A
8	Unemployed	Unemployed
9	Unemployed	Employed 16 hours a week as a carer
10	Unemployed	N/A
11	Self-employed complementary therapist	Self-employed complementary therapist Earnings had stayed the same, not meeting the MIF consistently
12	Self-employed doula, trainer, carer	Self-employed doula, trainer Earnings had gone down, not meeting the MIF consistently
13	Unemployed	Unemployed
14	Zero hours contract (academic support), self-employed (office administrator and research assistant)	Employed (council role), self-employed (office administrator and catering) Hours had stayed the same, earnings had gone down.
15	Self-employed hairdresser	Self-employed hairdresser Earnings had stayed the same, not meeting the MIF consistently
16	Unemployed	Unemployed
17	Employed 17 hours a week in administration	Employed 30 hours a week in administration Slight hourly-pay increase
18	Full-time student (no summer paid work)	Full-time student (no summer paid work but also no work-related requirements)
19	Self-employed cleaner	About to start a job as a carer (30 hours a week)
20	Unemployed	N/A
21	Unemployed	Unemployed
22	Unemployed	Employed as a cleaner, zero hours contract (20-44 hours a week)
23	Unemployed	Unemployed
24	Employed 16 hours a week as a shop assistant	Employed one day a week as a shop assistant Zero hours contract cleaning job (paid slightly higher) Working 16 hours a week in total

As the table demonstrates, there was little change between the first and second waves of interviews. All of the participants were still in receipt of Universal Credit. A further two participants had obtained and maintained jobs. One of these mothers got a job as a paid carer for people with learning disabilities and the other obtained a cleaning job. This mother explained:

It's like a zero hour contract what I'm on...it's cleaning at [event venue] so once the gig's finished at three o'clock in the morning we can go straight in and clean rather than waiting and then we can get done by eleven. *(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave two)*.

Two participants had moved from being self-employed to being employed. One of these participants obtained an administration job at a school and the other entered shift work as a paid carer for the elderly. For those already in paid work, earnings had stayed the same, gone down or increased (for the most part, the increases were slight and none of the increases were sufficient to engender a move off Universal Credit):

I think they [earnings] have sort of plateaued at the minute. *(P11, lone mother, two children aged seven and four, wave two)*

I got a new job which was being [role at council] and that happened in May. The [charity] job ended in July time so that was quite a nice swap over from one three day a week job basically switch that for a different three day a week job but for kind of half the money. *(P14, lone mother, one child aged eight, wave two)*

I've managed to increase my hours...it's an increase in pay as well...but as I said I still, because I'm a single parent and I'm not earning a fortune, I still have a contribution from Universal Credit. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and five, wave two)*

Five participants (of those re-interviewed and excluding the full-time student) were still unemployed at the second wave of interviews. Some of these participants described the difficulties of trying to obtain paid work:

I put down only a couple of weeks ago about applying for that other job and then cos that was within school hours it was fantastic so but I didn't hear a thing...so I thought oh well there'll be loads of people wanting school hours anyway isn't there so I know I'm going to be having problems there. *(P8, lone mother, two children aged thirteen and eleven, wave two)*

I went to job fair, I took some papers, I ask them about for job the time I wanted but they say no. Is impossible because they need me any time. *(P13, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave two)*

Of concern, all of the five participants who were still unemployed at the second wave of interviews had a health condition or had experienced domestic abuse, or both. In addition, four of these mothers had no family support and no contact with the children's fathers. Most had a lack of recent work experience. This suggests that conditionality is of particularly limited efficacy in moving those farthest from the paid labour market, and who have the most responsibility for unpaid care, into paid work. Concerning sustainability, over the course of the study five of the mothers obtained jobs but did not keep them due to problems with the formal childcare provision within Universal Credit (see Section 6.4) and health conditions. Overall, the findings show that despite the application of conditionality, the majority of the participants experienced a lack of sustained and significant change in employment status and earnings between the two rounds of interviews (cf. Dwyer, 2018a).

The eight mothers who had entered paid work (employment, self-employment, or a series of temporary jobs) since the start of their Universal Credit claim and remained in it at the second wave of interviews were typically engaged in gendered, low-paid and insecure paid work such as cleaning, caring, hairdressing, childminding and administration. One of the participants who had a master's degree obtained two roles since claiming Universal Credit that were of a higher status and less gendered. However, these roles were low-paid and she also undertook less secure, more

gendered work alongside them. This participant was very over-qualified for these other roles. Similarly, three of the other six participants were overqualified for the jobs they obtained. Previous research has also found that lone parents subject to conditionality tend to obtain low-paid, unsustainable jobs with limited prospects for career progression (Johnsen, 2016).

All of the mothers who entered paid work highlighted positives of their work. Some got a sense of achievement from working or found their particular job rewarding. Other positives included increased confidence, social interaction and the opportunity to be a role model for children. The main negatives cited were the detrimental impacts on their caring responsibilities and the tiredness and stress incurred (see Chapter 5.4). While some of the participants explained that they were able to provide for their children more materially as a result of paid work, others expressed resentment for the low pay they received. One participant who had entered paid care work reported that while she found it personally rewarding as she was making a considerable difference to the people she cared for, she was not paid well enough for what she was doing. As this reflection indicates, the types of paid work the participants obtained are not intrinsically of low value, but are not valued in society due to the gendered cultural devaluation of the types of paid work women are concentrated in (Fraser, 1998). This study reinforces concerns that without a re-evaluation of different types of paid work, compelling women into work through conditional benefits reproduces gendered economic inequalities (Grover, 2007).

6.7.2 Views on whether Universal Credit affected employment trajectories

At the first wave of interviews, there was variation in the mothers' views regarding whether Universal Credit had affected their employment trajectories. The largest proportion of participants did not think Universal Credit had brought them closer to paid work. The main reason given for this was that they were motivated to undertake paid work anyway and were already taking proactive steps to obtain paid work:

I don't think that makes any difference...I think it's all about determination that you do yourself... So when I was made redundant I wasn't on Universal Credit

for like two months and I found my job without the help of them. No disrespect to my work coach or anything but I mean like I went out and looked for work. *(P10, lone mother, one child aged ten, wave one)*

Many of these participants considered that the job search requirements were futile, counter-productive or added unnecessary pressure (Dwyer, 2018a):

Like the more they tell you to do it the more I'm like right just stop because I know what I'm doing and you pressuring me, like pressuring me to do it, doesn't help. Like I'm trying my best to do this. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

The second largest proportion of participants—the majority of whom had an easement—did think Universal Credit had brought them closer to paid work. The overwhelming reason given for this view was the support they had received, or expected to receive in the future, from the JCP, organisations working in conjunction with the JCP or organisations they had been signposted to through the JCP. On being asked whether she thought Universal Credit had brought her closer to work, one participant replied:

Yeah definitely, definitely. Even just the courses. I know I keep mentioning these courses but they've been so helpful. *(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one)*

The remaining participants gave a mixed response as to whether Universal Credit had brought them closer to work. For example, one mother explained that both Universal Credit and external factors had brought her closer to paid work, and that in regard to Universal Credit while the accountability had been important, the human contact had been more significant:

It's been a motivational thing and being accountable for my personality helps. If I have to be accountable to something then I do it...But there's many factors I wouldn't say it's just the Universal Credit...I walk out [of work search review appointments] and I feel quite like: oh ok, yes I'm going to get that next client.

An he's [work coach] kind of encouraged, there is a sense of encouragement. So the human element I feel is more the motivation than anything. Probably if I could pinpoint one thing it's that. *(P1, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one)*

At the second wave of interviews, a larger proportion of participants stated that Universal Credit had not brought them closer to paid work, at times because support was discontinued or expected support had not been received. In addition, at the second wave the participants were more likely to state that rather than helping them enter paid work or increase their earnings, the conditionality within Universal Credit caused stress, pressure, fear and depression. One of the self-employed mothers explained:

I think it just adds pressure...I'm all about you know having goals and wanting to earn a certain amount etcetera but I think it's different when you set it as opposed to when someone else's setting it for you. *(P11, lone mother, two children aged seven and four, wave two)*

At the second wave of interviews there was also a higher prevalence of mothers who stated they thought the conditionality within Universal Credit was counterproductive. These mothers had more prolonged experience of trying to meet work-related requirements by the second wave of interviews and as the quote below indicates, this longer duration of being subject to conditionality resulted in increased detrimental impacts on attempts to obtain paid work:

I don't think it's that helpful cos you can job search and job search and not get anywhere and it can be even more discouraging. *(P23, lone mother, two children aged eight and seven, wave two)*

The mothers who had entered paid work since claiming Universal Credit had mixed perceptions as to whether, and the extent to which, this could be attributed to Universal Credit. Four of the participants stated they did not think the conditionality regime within Universal Credit had been a factor in their moves into paid work. They perceived they were already motivated and attributed obtaining paid work to their

own efforts. Three of the mothers gave a mixed response, stating the job search requirements had brought them closer to paid work but they were already motivated, for example one participant explained:

It would have motivated me yeah...Because I was motivated to work anyway. Like I've always been motivated to work so I wouldn't have wanted to do anything other than look for jobs and I also wouldn't have wanted to have to keep going in in-person which was the situation when I first applied. *(P14, lone parent, one child aged eight, wave one)*

Only one of the participants unequivocally attributed her entrance into paid work to the job search requirements of Universal Credit:

Yeah because at the end of the day you need the money don't you? Yeah, it does give you that push. *(P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and nine, wave one)*

This participant was studying for a degree and became a self-employed hairdresser as a result of the conditionality within Universal Credit. She had not wanted to enter paid work as she wanted to focus on her studies and her children. As noted in Section 6.5.3 above, she considered the compulsion to enter paid work to be detrimental to her studies and therefore long-term career prospects. Similarly, the comments at waves one and two from the participant who had a series of temporary jobs over the course of the study indicate that while she was already motivated to undertake paid work, the conditionality regime within Universal Credit negatively impacted her long-term career prospects and planning:

(Wave One) That's like making me want to be in like just have anything and I don't think that's a good way of being. I think I need to be a bit more like what is really going to work for me and my family whereas at the moment I'm just like oh my God I need to have a job.

(Wave Two) Like now I'm like oh I'll go work in a café, I'll do anything when I think I should really be focusing on something that's going to, not that there's

anything wrong with working in a café but it would be nice to have a career.
(P5, lone mother, one child aged three)

Overall, among the perceptions concerning the efficacy of Universal Credit in assisting people into paid work, there was a striking lack of references to the work-related requirements as a positive motivator. Most of the participants considered the mandatory requirements to be irrelevant, futile or counter-productive (in regard to both their short term employment prospects and long term employment trajectories). The support some of the participants received in entering paid work was more commonly cited as a contributing factor to improving job prospects than the job search requirements. This corresponds with previous research which found that appropriate and substantial support rather than sanctions are key to prompting moves into paid work (cf. Dwyer, 2018a).

The longitudinal analysis presented above indicates that the conditionality within Universal Credit was largely ineffective in helping mothers enter secure, sustainable, adequately-paid jobs and progress in paid work. At the second wave of interviews, a considerable proportion of the participants had not entered paid work or substantially increased their earnings despite continued motivation and ongoing job search. This finding is consistent with prior research which also found very limited evidence that conditionality improves sustained moves into employment and stimulates progression in the paid labour market (Dwyer, 2018b; Reeves, 2017; Goodwin, 2008). While some of the participants had moved into paid work since the start of their Universal Credit claim, they mainly attributed this to their own motivation and efforts rather than to the conditionality within Universal Credit. While participants across the sample routinely did not consider the conditionality to be effective in bringing them closer to paid work as they were already motivated to do so, some participants did think that the conditionality negatively impacted their long-term career prospects through the emphasis on getting claimants into paid work quickly. Also, regardless of education level, the vast majority of the participants who obtained paid work entered gendered, low-paid, insecure, part-time work. This suggests that the conditionality within Universal Credit does not support women in obtaining jobs that improve their disadvantaged position in the paid labour market and can exacerbate it through the 'work-first' approach. Consequently, these findings reflect

concerns that conditionality can entrench gender inequalities in the paid labour market (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011; MacLeavy, 2011; Grabham and Smith, 2010; Grover, 2007; MacLeavy, 2007).

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the conditionality within Universal Credit had limited positive impact on the employment trajectories of these mothers. A significant proportion of the participants did not enter paid work, there was a distinct lack of progression in the paid labour market and those who did obtain paid work either did not sustain it or obtained jobs that were gendered, low-paid and insecure. Key contributing factors to the lack of sustained moves into secure, adequately-paid work and increases in earnings were the difficulties in accessing the formal childcare provision within Universal Credit and the absence of support received from work coaches and the JCP. While many of the participants had positive relationships with their work coaches, and for some this made a difference to their experiences of Universal Credit, on the whole this did not result in increased moves into paid work as it was not accompanied by meaningful support. Of significance, the mothers who either currently or previously had an easement (due to experiences of domestic abuse or health conditions) were less likely to obtain paid work, in part because they were not ready to enter paid work or were not given the support they needed in overcoming the substantial barriers they faced. There were other variations in employment outcomes in the sample. For example, the majority of the middle class mothers were in paid work at the second wave of interviews. However, as many of these mothers were self-employed, they encountered difficulties with meeting the MIF and thus faced in-work precarity. The study also indicates that the lack of movements into adequately-paid, secure, sustainable work is due to the 'work-first' approach. This limited some of the mothers' opportunities for long-term career planning and training, and resulted in some mothers taking the first job available regardless of compatibility with education, experience and caring responsibilities. Therefore, this study indicates that conditionality does not help improve women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market and in some ways entrenches it further.

The inefficacy of conditionality to improve women's position in the paid labour market may in part be due to the contested emphasis within this measure on the need to motivate claimants to enter paid work rather than on addressing barriers to paid work. The participants did not lack paid work aspirations but instead faced considerable barriers to undertaking paid work, chiefly the difficulties of combining paid work with caring responsibilities arising from the gendered division in unpaid care. While there is some attempt within Universal Credit to ease women's responsibility for unpaid care through the increased contributions to formal childcare costs, for many of the mothers of this study, this was inaccessible, impractical and not comprehensive enough. As a result of this, and also the lack of support, advice and training for entering paid work, the mothers were subject to increasing expectations of paid work but were not adequately helped in overcoming the barriers they faced. This suggests that the government is requiring more of claimants while failing to fulfil its responsibilities to them, thereby raising questions about contractualist justifications for implementing and increasing conditionality (cf. McKeever and Walsh, 2020; Grover, 2012). The findings also call into question paternalist justifications for conditionality and the emphasis on paid work as the best route out of poverty as, due to the types of jobs the mothers obtained and the cultural valuation of such roles, they were unlikely to obtain either a sufficient income or dignity (Albelda, 2001).

As the conditionality within Universal Credit is of limited efficacy in improving sustained moves into adequately paid work and can further women's disadvantaged labour market position, this policy has wider implications for women's citizenship status. In current dominant gendered citizenship frameworks, mothers who are not engaged in paid work do not obtain citizenship status. Therefore, as some of the mothers, and particularly those furthest from the paid labour market, were not helped by the Universal Credit conditionality regime in securing paid work, this policy did not enable them to obtain citizenship status. For the mothers subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit who did obtain paid work, the types of jobs they obtained did not confer sufficient pay, social standing, or employment-related social security rights and more broadly did not enable these mothers to obtain full citizenship status. For example, the jobs obtained were not paid at levels sufficient to grant mothers economic independence and therefore they still did not possess this

primary citizenship attribute. Thus while the conditionality within Universal Credit furthers the gendered notion that social citizenship status is only obtained through engagement in paid work, this policy is largely ineffective in enabling them to obtain citizenship status in its current gendered form. The next chapter discusses the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's agency, a further key issue that relates to women's citizenship.

Chapter 7: The effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit on mothers' agency

7.1 Introduction

Agency refers to the ability to determine one's own daily life (Annesley, 2007) and relates to the capacity for free choice (McNay, 2016; Wright, 2012; Lister, 2003; Gould, 1983) (see Chapter 1.3.4). Enlarging women's ability to exercise agency regarding engagement in both unpaid care and paid work is a key aspect of creating a more gender inclusive concept of citizenship given the importance of enabling women to participate in both unpaid care and paid work and the constraints placed on women's agency (see Chapter 2.2.3). Specifically regarding unpaid care, while women have been assumed to be natural carers and ascribed the duty of care, Marshall's influential concept of citizenship did not include the right to give and receive unpaid care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997). Therefore, the right to give care needs to be established in order for women to have genuine choice about their engagement in unpaid care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997). This is particularly important in the context of the attempted shift to the adult worker model (see Chapter 2.2.1). There have been concerns that rather than establishing the right to give care and promote genuine choice regarding unpaid care and paid work (Lewis, 1997), conditionality may deny mothers the choice to carry out unpaid care and restrict their agency in regard to decisions about their engagement in the paid labour market (Millar, 2019; Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Davies, 2015, 2012; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Grabham and Smith, 2010). To investigate these concerns and also how mothers respond to the compulsion within the Universal Credit regime, this chapter addresses the following research question:

To what extent do mothers experience compulsion through being subject to the welfare conditionality within Universal Credit and how do they respond to it over time?

Section 7.2 of this chapter details the participants' work-care choices. Section 7.3 investigates the extent to which the participants' Claimant Commitments were

negotiated and Section 7.4 discusses the participants' experiences of compulsion over time. Section 7.5 explores the participants' views on the compulsion within Universal Credit. Section 7.6 discusses the participants' responses to the compulsion within Universal Credit and Section 7.7 explores the overall impacts of the compulsion on the participants' agency regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work.

7.2 The participants' work-care choices

In line with previous research (for example, Coleman and Riley, 2012; Thomas and Griffiths, 2006), the majority of the participants reported that they wanted to undertake part-time paid work. While there was variation in the number of hours the mothers wanted to work, the mothers consistently referred to wanting paid work that fitted in with their caring responsibilities:

I would prefer to squeeze all my paid work between the hours of nine and three. *(P14, lone mother, one child aged eight, wave one)*

Children aren't a nine to five so again you have to work around them not them work around you. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen, wave one)*

Prior research has also shown that lone mothers want and need paid employment that fits around their caring responsibilities, described as "work-fits-family and not family-fits-work" (Millar, 2019, p.91). At the first wave of interviews, a couple of the mothers did not want to undertake any paid work at the current time on account of their caring responsibilities:

So ideally I'd want to be like completely focused on them...cos I do know a lot of my time and energy is focused on working when I wish I was spending time with them. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three, wave one)*

A couple of the mothers wanted full-time paid work. One of these mothers' comments show that her reasons for wanting to work full-time were in order to

provide for her son financially and also to demonstrate the importance of paid work to him:

I've always worked but then...there's times that I can't get back with my kid, with my little boy. But then I've thought about money and I've thought about paying my bills and I've thought about putting food on the table and coming across to my son that work is really important. *(P10, lone mother, one child aged ten, wave one)*

The study's findings largely support the theory that mothers' orientations to unpaid care and paid work are underpinned by their views on what it means to be a 'good mother' (Duncan et al., 2003; Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Duncan and Edwards' research also shows that mothers can have multiple gendered moral rationalities. Likewise, in the current study, on occasion the participants gave mixed answers as to their choices regarding their engagement in unpaid care and paid work:

I feel better in myself for actually going out and working and doing something and being productive so oh but then again I don't know cos then I feel like I don't really see my kids that much so it's hard to balance it isn't it?...really I'd work all the hours God sent me but then on the other hand I'd spend all my time with my children as well. If I could split myself into two people then that'd be perfect. *(P22, lone parent, two children aged seven and five, wave two)*

Similarly, a substantial proportion of the participants reported that they faced difficult choices in regard to their engagement in paid work and unpaid care. Another mother initially stated that she "definitely" wanted to undertake paid work. However, as the conversation progressed she said:

It's just not worth it. Yeah and it's stressful going to work when you have two young children as well. You've got a house to sort, you've got two children to make sure, you know it's not just easy to leave your children with any childcare provider. It's a worry. You don't know what they're doing or who they're with or so that's a lot of stress so really in the ideal world it's not really worth going to work for that little bit extra...It's very tiring with a four year old

and a two year old and then a full-time or part-time job. Why would I want to?
(P20, coupled mother, two children aged four and two, wave one)

The above quote illustrates that mothers' employment choices are constrained partly by the gendered imbalance in unpaid care but also by structural factors such as the cost of childcare and lack of adequately-paid jobs (Williams, 2004). These findings also show that mothers are under pressure to fulfil dual and conflicting expectations of unpaid care and paid work (Vincent, Ball and Braun, 2010) and therefore have difficult work-care choices to negotiate.

The longitudinal aspect of the study showed that over time, there was very little change in the participants' work-care choices. At the second wave of interviews, the vast majority of the participants stated their work-care choices had stayed the same. For example, one mother explained at the two waves of interviews:

(Wave One) [The] ideal world I maybe strive for is that at some point I can balance that by working around the hours of them being at school. So they're at school, I work, they're off school, I care for them...I don't want to have to call on childcare.

(Wave Two) I want to be the one who looks after my children. I don't want to have to have someone else. That's always been my thing. *(P1, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven)*

The overall lack of change in the participants' work-care choices over time raises questions about the aim of Universal Credit to change behaviours and attitudes to paid work (see Chapter 3.2.2). The government has contended that policy levers within Universal Credit (including intensified conditionality) will lead to changes in claimants' attitudes and behaviours regarding paid work and will ultimately result in improved labour market outcomes (DWP, 2017b). However, this study suggests that for primary carers of children, the conditionality within Universal Credit does not change attitudes to paid work and that there is a failure to recognise the strength of mothers' moral considerations about what is right for their children in relation to their engagement in unpaid care and paid work.

7.3 The extent to which the Claimant Commitments were negotiated

In light of the mothers' specific work-care choices discussed above, this section explores the extent to which the participants were able to negotiate their Claimant Commitments. Claimants need to accept a Claimant Commitment to receive Universal Credit payments. According to the government literature, the Claimant Commitment is a "contract" between the claimant and the state (DWP, 2014a) which sets out what claimants have "agreed" to do to prepare for and look for work or increase their earnings (DWP, 2020b). However, for the most part, the participants had no choice in their commitments and felt compelled to accept them as they knew that if they did not, they would not receive Universal Credit payments. Twenty of the twenty-four mothers explained there had been no negotiation when the commitments were set (cf. Dwyer, 2018a; Fawcett Society, 2015), and the four participants who did consider that their commitments had been negotiated all had easements (see Section 5.3.1). One participant explained that there was a lack of negotiation when her Claimant Commitment was drawn up and later in the interview showed her frustration at being subject to potential sanctioning when she did not consider that her work-related requirements were appropriate in the first place:

I don't think that it was [negotiated]... I think it was as though there were a variety of different kind of holes that you can sort of fit in and they sort of allocated you to one and it was either that or actually you don't fit any of them so you wouldn't be entitled to anything...

...that you can be penalised if you're not fulfilling the requirements that perhaps weren't actually the true requirements at the time it was just that it was slotted in because it seemed the least worst route to take under the different options that you could go for with Universal Credit. (*P2, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one*)

Several participants reported there was no discussion of the Claimant Commitment and therefore no opportunity to negotiate their work-related requirements. At other times, the participants' attempts to negotiate their Claimant Commitments did not result in alterations or accommodations. One self-employed participant explained:

When I spoke to the work coach I said, “I don’t really need to be looking for work do I cos I am working?” And they was like, “Oh yeah, yeah, just agree.” So I just did. (*P19, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven, wave one*)

The general lack of negotiation of the Claimant Commitment raises questions as to the description of this document as a “contract” and the use of the word “agree” in the government literature (DWP, 2020b, 2014a). This language implies claimants have choice as to whether or not they commit to carrying out their work-related requirements (Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b). However, the participants were made very aware that if they did not accept their Claimant Commitments, they would not get their Universal Credit payments. Therefore, as claimants need Universal Credit payments, and can only get them if they accept their Claimant Commitments, the element of choice is missing and instead the Commitments are accepted under duress (Standing, 2011; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b; Goodin, 2001). These findings also demonstrate that the state has a problematic amount of power over claimants in setting directives concerning their everyday lives. This was particularly concerning given that for half of the mothers of the study, the work-related requirements stated on their Claimant Commitments were incompatible with their work-care choices.

7.4 Experiences of compulsion over time

As noted in Chapter 5.3, in addition to having a role in setting work-related requirements, work coaches are also largely responsible for implementing conditionality on an ongoing basis and therefore their actions were important to the mothers’ experiences of compulsion over time. As discussed below, there were other elements of the system which also contributed to the mothers’ experiences of the compulsion within Universal Credit. Regarding interactions with work coaches, while there was a high degree of compulsion when the participants’ work-related requirements were set, there was variation as to the extent to which the requirements were enforced by work coaches on an ongoing basis. This was particularly evident in the mothers’ reflections on the work coaches’ differing expectations and monitoring of claimants’ reporting of mandatory work-related

activity on their online journals. Some participants were asked to do a considerable amount of reporting and this was checked up on:

You've got to prove like provide everything what you've been doing, what you've applied for and they keep a check on it as well and they keep saying, "Oh you need to do more, write it down."...when she spoke to me the last time she did say, "You need to record more about what you're doing because it could affect your benefits." (P21, one mother, one child aged fourteen, wave one)

I had to show that I was looking for work and I had to write on this journal every single day pretty much what I'd done, whether I'd looked in newspapers an every kind of, anything that I could to prove that I was looking for work and if you didn't you'd get like: "You know there's nothing been on your journal for a while, what's going on?" (P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and nine, wave one)

These experiences greatly contrast with those of another participant, interviewed at the first wave of interviews but not at the second wave, who was subject to job search requirements. She explained, "You don't get checked up on. Not at all," and later in the interview on being asked whether she had to report her job search activity replied:

I don't think so, unless I've just fallen off the grid with them. No one's got in contact with me but I'm happy with that. (P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)

Most of the other participants were required to report their job search activity on their online journal but many did not think they were checked up on as one participant commented:

So really they're coming down with a stick quite thoroughly but I don't really know if they do check at all so if you've not going to do both then it seems daft coming down with the stick really. Erm making yourself appear to be quite

cold and heartless and in fact you're maybe not really thoroughly checking what people are doing. It's very difficult. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and five, wave two)*

The variation in the mothers' experiences of conditionality was also evident in the differing frequencies of work coach appointments. Some mothers had limited or virtually no contact with their work coaches whereas other mothers had to attend meetings at the JCP much more frequently, for example on a weekly or fortnightly basis. In addition, the discussions the mothers had with their work coaches concerning paid work choices varied. While some mothers felt their choices regarding engagement in paid work were acknowledged by their work coaches, others believed their choices were disregarded:

She's really understanding about the fact that I want to better myself before I do go into work which is nice cos I felt like I was going to be just forced to go into a job that I didn't want to go into. *(P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one)*

And they told me I if any work I have I can take it but I told them I don't want any job. I want to improve my English because like improve reading and talking because my children need help homework. I need help them ...that's why I explain to them everything but they not understand me. They say you have to looking any job. *(P13, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one)*

The first mother quoted above had an easement. Other mothers with easements typically considered they faced more understanding and leniency from their work coaches in regard to mandatory work-related requirements.

While some of the variation in experiences can be explained through the presence of an easement and the different employment status of the participants (discussed further below), there was variation in the way the work coaches set and monitored work-related requirements on an ongoing basis which cannot entirely be explained by differences within the sample. The findings suggest that discretion on the part of

frontline workers was also significant to the mothers' experiences of conditionality. This demonstrates the influence frontline workers can have on the delivery of government policy (Lipsky, 2010) and also supports claims that frontline workers are important specifically to the delivery of conditionality policies (Caswell et al., 2017; Nothdurfter, 2016; Fletcher, 2011). Concerns have been raised that increased discretion may result in inconsistency in referrals for sanctions (National Audit Office, 2016) and leave lone parents vulnerable to subjective decisions at crucial junctures of their claim (Cain, 2016). However, this study shows that there can be considerable and concerning inconsistencies in the more routine aspects of how conditionality is enforced. This is significant given that, as a result of the variations in experience, some participants felt supported in their work-care choices by their work coaches whereas others were subject to high levels of surveillance and intrusion.

Over time, all of the participants (apart from one who had a fit note) who were unemployed at the second wave of interviews reported that there had been an increase in mandatory requirements between the two waves of interviews. This included directives to apply for particular jobs, to undertake mandatory training and to attend jobs fairs. One participant explained that the pressure she experienced within the Universal Credit system had increased between the two waves of interviews because over time, there had been an increase in the mandatory requirements she was expected to meet. The quotes below show the mandatory activities she was required to fulfil in addition to her weekly job search hours and work search review appointments at the two waves of interviews:

(Wave One) I've got an appointment today to go over my CV and start on the handing out and my appointment last week just happened to be on the same day as a job fair so I got sent along to the job fair as well.

(Wave Two) There was the [mandatory training at a retailer] thing and I was being asked to apply for specific jobs as well and being given sheets for them and they wanted feedback that I'd definitely done it. *(P23, lone parent, two children aged eight and seven)*

Crucially, this increase in mandatory requirements was not accompanied by an increase in support in obtaining paid work (see Chapter 6.5.2). This indicates that the work coaches' response to ongoing unemployment was to increase compulsion rather than help claimants address barriers to paid work.

The participants who were self-employed had different experiences of compulsion over time related to their employment status. At the first wave of interviews, the self-employed mothers generally experienced lighter conditionality than the mothers who were required to job search. For example, they were required to attend fewer work coach meetings and could not be subject to directives to apply for particular jobs. They also were not subject to the requirement to travel a particular distance to look for paid work. One of the participants explained that she became self-employed to avoid certain requirements:

I used to be a self-employed hairdresser so I thought well that's probably my best option now cos he [work coach] basically said you know you need to, if a job comes up at Aldi in [village] you have to take it and it wouldn't, they wouldn't take the hours into consideration. *(P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and nine, wave one)*

As mentioned in Chapter 5.4, most of the mothers who were self-employed were middle class. In the main these mothers had, or were working towards, university level qualifications. This suggests that more educated mothers in receipt of Universal Credit can use their cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) to become self-employed and subsequently reduce the levels of compulsion they are subject to particularly during the first year of their claim (the start-up period). However, as at the second wave of interviews the self-employed participants were subject to the MIF (see Chapter 3.2.3), these participants were under increased pressure to meet their expected earnings. The below quotes illustrate this change in pressure:

(Wave One) They seem to be very hands off at the moment...because they [the work-related requirements] weren't defined, then it's as I see fit in a way.

(Wave Two) I think it's very difficult with the self-employed and the Minimum Income Floor...I think there's the sort of stress around it for me comes from the fluctuation [in earnings]. *(P2, two children aged nine and seven)*

Whereas the unemployed claimants were subject to the potential for sanction for failing to undertake work-related requirements, the self-employed claimants were certain to incur reductions in overall income if they did not meet the MIF. Therefore, arguably, conditionality was more strictly enforced for these mothers in regard to reaching a certain level of earnings.

The mothers who were subject to in-work conditionality generally faced lesser compulsion than those who were unemployed, however there was considerable variation in the experiences of these mothers. At the first wave of interviews, two of the four mothers subject to in-work conditionality had to take part in telephone appointments in which they were asked about their attempts to find more paid work or increase their earnings whereas the other two mothers did not have any regular contact with their work coaches. At the second wave of interviews, the telephone appointments ceased for one of the participants who had previously been required to participate in these despite only a very slight increase in earnings. However, for the other participant, compulsion increased. She frequently had to attend both in-person and telephone appointments and to report her job search activity on her online journal. She explained at the two waves of interviews:

(Wave One) So 'To-do list' [on her online Universal Credit account] and it says take part in your work search review by phone. That's the only thing I've got to do on the 5th of April.

(Wave Two) If you're not working twenty-five hours which is why I'm hating Universal Credit you have to non-stop go to interviews or they're messaging you for interviews or they're on the phone to make sure you're keeping up with your Commitments... you've got this fricking machine, this Universal Credit bloody bully that literally is on you all the time. *(P24, lone mother, three children aged thirteen, ten and five)*

This participant was working sixteen hours a week and as such should not have been subject to job search requirements as her earnings were above the AET (see Chapter 3.3.2). This suggests that the variation in experiences of the employed participants may partly be due to different work coaches' knowledge of the relevant legislation regarding in-work conditionality (see Chapter 5.3.1).

Across the sample, one common finding was the lack of application of sanctions for non-compliance with mandatory work-related requirements. One mother in paid work thought she may have been sanctioned for not completing mandatory online administrative tasks but was not sure as her Universal Credit payments routinely fluctuated. Three of the mothers had their payments stopped but this was due to issues with reporting earnings and Universal Credit payments were reinstated within days. Over the course of the study, four of the mothers missed appointments with their work coaches. While these mothers were warned this could result in a sanction, on giving their reasons for missing the appointments their reasons were accepted and they were not referred for a sanction. However, for one of the mothers following this incident her work coach told her she needed to update her journal more:

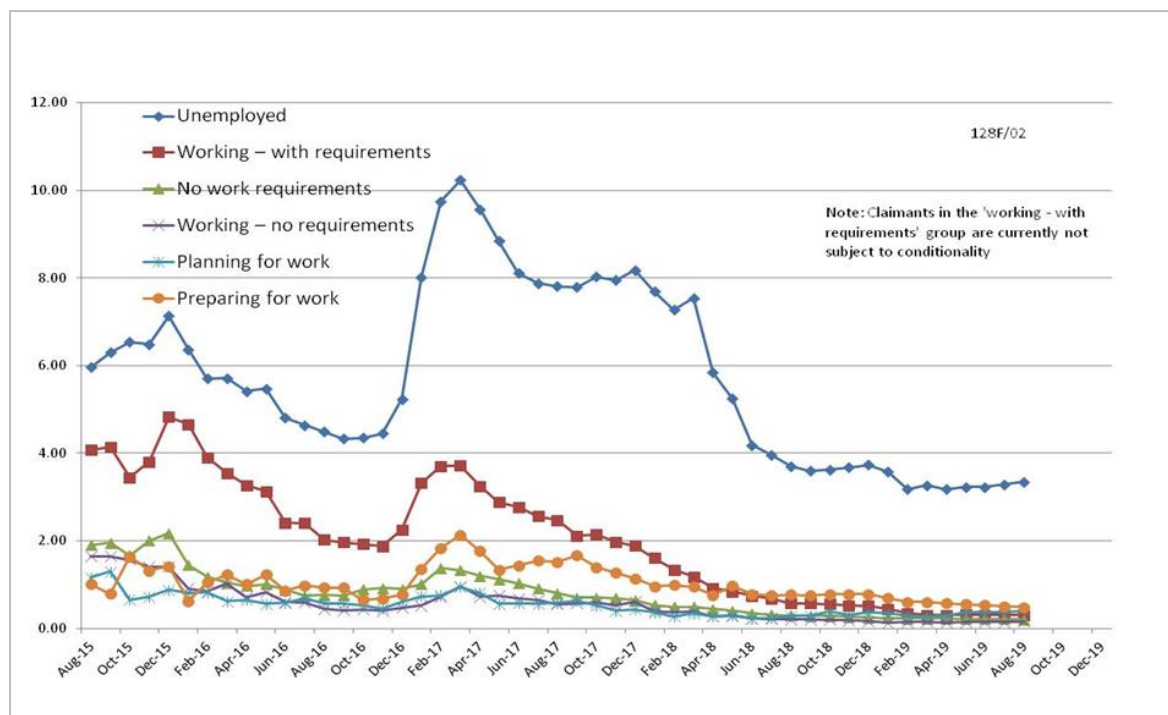
But the next time I went to see him he was like, "Look at this your journal, you haven't updated your journal," and I didn't really register when he said, I thought it was just for fun. It's not just for fun. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave one)*

Similarly another participant who had not followed a directive to apply for a particular job (because she did not have a CV) was not sanctioned but was told that she had ten days to follow her work coach's directives or face sanctioning:

And last time they was send me for ten days if I will not do what they told me and that was difficult for me cos they told me about checking everything, changing something like that and looking for a job. Now was pressing me cos I have to do it before ten days. Now on I was worry they can cut my money. *(P13, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave two)*

Therefore, while non-compliance with mandatory work-related requirements resulted in increased monitoring and threats of sanctioning, it did not result in referrals for sanctions. There are several possible reasons for this. First, sanction rates in the UK are decreasing as shown in Figure 4 below:

Figure 4 Percentage of Universal Credit claimants under sanction by conditionality group



Source: Webster, 2019

Second, there may have been leniency towards those who did not comply with requirements on account of the fact they were mothers. The majority of the participants who missed their appointments did so on account of their caring responsibilities (for example, one mother missed a telephone appointment as she was dropping her children off at school and did not hear her phone) which suggests that mothers' caring responsibilities may be taken into account when the potential for sanctions arises (cf. Chapter 5.3). Third, four out of the five participants who missed appointments had, or previously had, an easement and this may also have impacted the leniency they received. Fourth and possibly related to the fact they had an easement (see Chapter 5.3.1), the majority of those who missed appointments had particularly positive relationships with their work coaches and their work coaches

may have been reluctant to sanction them. This highlights the complex and dual role work coaches have of both providing employment support to claimants and enforcing a conditionality regime (Patrick, 2017; Fletcher, 2011).

Despite the variations in the levels and monitoring of work-related requirements on an ongoing basis and the lack of sanctions, the overwhelming majority of the mothers' reported experiencing pressure from the Universal Credit system. The quotes below indicate that this pressure was caused by the expectation to enter paid work, the mandatory work-related requirements and the fear of sanctions (discussed further in Section 7.6):

They always tell you once they reach five you have {emphasis on 'have'} to look for work...and that's not great. Pressure. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

I know it's only ten hours but still it's like I just think oh what have I done this week or if I've not been to [women's charity] or I've not seen [lone parent mentor] it's like oh yes let's just knuckle down and look at some jobs now and just say what you've been looking at and yeah so sometimes there is that pressure. *(P8, lone mother, two children aged thirteen and eleven, wave two)*

I think there's pressure on being a mum anyway and then pressure to work and pressure to find a job and worry about sanctions. *(P5, lone mother, one child aged two, wave one)*

The participants spoke of the pressure in negative terms with some commenting that it was unnecessary and detrimental:

Yeah pressure. It wasn't a nice feeling. It made you feel quite low to be honest...I had every intention of finding work you know which it would have been nicer to do in my own time really rather than having this these demands put on me. *(P17, lone parent, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

Several participants similarly indicated that the compulsion within Universal Credit can be experienced as disempowering as they explained that having the requirements made them feel like they were being treated like children (cf. Patrick, 2017):

You're just sat in waiting room just dread filling up in you. It's like oh what's she going to say now and am I going to get told off for something, you know like a little kid waiting outside the headmaster's office. *(P21, lone parent, one child aged fourteen, wave two)*

With Universal Credit you're like totally, it's you're disgraced for not doing as you're told, like a little child. *(P24, lone parent, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two)*

The finding that participants are urged into paid work through authoritarian and paternalistic discipline of them highlights the contradiction within Universal Credit policy wherein claimants are expected to become independent and assume more responsibility and yet are subject to increasing degrees of control (Millar and Bennett, 2017). Additionally, such punitive and paternalistic compulsion within conditionality policies may contribute to a weakening of self-esteem and therefore undermine claimants' ability to find paid work (Wright and Patrick, 2019).

The analysis presented above shows that the participants were subject to differing levels and types of compulsion. This varied by easement (particularly at the first wave of interviews), work coach discretion and employment status. The longitudinal aspect of the study showed that for many participants the compulsion increased over time. While the self-employed participants were subject to less compulsion within Universal Credit particularly during the start-up period, they were subject to considerable degrees of compulsion regarding their levels of earnings once the MIF was applied. The participants who were unemployed throughout the course of the study faced the highest levels of directives and monitoring over time in regard to ongoing work-related requirements. While this latter finding is unsurprising, it is problematic given that these participants tended to have health conditions, previous experiences of domestic abuse and lower levels of cultural and social capital, and

yet were not given additional support. The analysis presented above also shows that work coach discretion is important to participants' experiences of the conditionality within Universal Credit. However, there are limits to the impacts work coach discretion has on the amount of compulsion which the participants feel they are under due to the mandatory expectation within the system backed by sanctions that participants will search for and undertake paid work. As a result, despite the participants being subject to varying expectations and monitoring, most of the participants experienced considerable levels of pressure within the Universal Credit system.

7.5 Views on the compulsion within Universal Credit

Through exploring the mothers' views on conditionality, this section further illuminates the extent to which the mothers experienced compulsion within the Universal Credit system and also provides context for their responses to the compulsion discussed in the preceding section. This section highlights the mothers' resentment of being subject to conditionality and also the mismatch between the compulsion within Universal Credit and the mothers' views regarding the amount of agency mothers should be afforded in relation to their engagement in paid work and unpaid care.

7.5.1 Views on choice in the Universal Credit system

In line with feminist arguments emphasising the importance of promoting genuine choice in regard to engagement in unpaid care and paid work (Lewis, 1997), the majority of the participants considered mothers' ability to exercise choice as important (cf. Judge, 2015a). Most of the participants expressed the view that mothers should have choice as to when they enter paid work and how much paid work they do:

I think ideally people should have the choice about being with their children full-time and not having that pressure to also have to be working. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three, wave one)*

I think that should be completely down to the mum. I do. Yeah because only that mum knows what she can manage. (*P22, lone mother, two children aged seven and five, wave one*)

Fourteen of the twenty-four participants stated that mothers should not be required to undertake paid work by the government in part because of the importance of mothers' roles as unpaid carers (see Chapter 5.5.1) and also because mothers have differing circumstances and varied orientations regarding their engagement in unpaid care and paid work:

I think it's very difficult to give a blanket ruling like that because everyone's circumstances are so different. (*P2, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one*)

There's so many different factors...So it is really difficult cos it is such a big contrast [between] what different people want. (*P23, lone mother, two children aged seven and six, wave one*)

These participants objected to having the uniform threshold of the youngest child's age at which mothers are expected to undertake paid work. Concerns have also been raised in the academic literature about the arbitrary nature of the age thresholds used in conditionality policies due to their failure to account for multiple disadvantages (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Haux, 2012) or multiple children (Griggs and Bennett, 2009) which can hinder engagement in paid work regardless of the youngest child's age.

Seven of the participants expressed the view that it is reasonable to require mothers to undertake paid work once the children attend primary school and two of the participants thought mothers should be required to undertake paid work when the children are of secondary school age. Only one of the participants stated that the age threshold of three years, at which mothers are required to enter paid work within Universal Credit policy, is fair. This participant explained that while it is difficult to have one rule, mothers of three year olds can obtain government help with formal childcare provision.

When expressing their views on the amount of choice mothers should have regarding their engagement in paid work, many of the participants made negative comparisons with the compulsion in the Universal Credit system:

I don't think it should be up to the JobCentre to tell them that they need to do this and this and this and you need to work. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

As a parent...it's your choice whether you want to work or stay at home and look after your children you know and to be now put under the pressure with this Universal Credit you know is really unfair you know. *(P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and ten, wave two)*

Similarly, many of the mothers expressed the view that there is a lack of choice within the Universal Credit system:

There's no choice, there's no element of choice, would you rather look after the children or would you rather work. Nobody ever asks that question. *(P2, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave one)*

I have no choice. What do I do? Say no. You have no choice. You have absolutely no control, no choice. If you don't do something that they, it's like a, is it called a dictatorship? *(P24, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two)*

These perceptions concerning the lack of choice within the Universal Credit conditionality regime regarding mandatory engagement in paid work and work-related requirements support claims that this policy reduces mothers' choices about their engagement in unpaid care and paid work (Millar, 2019; Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Davies, 2015, 2012; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Grabham and Smith, 2010). This finding is significant given that a key aspect of exercising agency is the capacity for free choice (McNay, 2016; Wright, 2012; Lister, 2003; Gould, 1983) and enlarging women's capacity to exercise agency in regard to engagement in unpaid care and

paid work is an essential element of creating a more gender inclusive citizenship framework.

7.5.2 Feelings on having work-related requirements

In addition to investigating the participants' views regarding the appropriateness of requiring mothers to undertake paid work, the research also explored at the second wave of interviews the participants' feelings on being subject to work-related requirements. The vast majority of the participants resented being subject to work-related requirements. Some of the participants displayed anger while others displayed distress:

Oh I hate it. I hate it...in the three days before that [work search review appointment] every time I turned on the radio I kept hearing Freddie Mercury 'I want to break free'. And I'm like I do. I just want to get out of it. *(P11, lone parent, two children aged seven and four, wave two)*

It's awful, it really is. You know I mean you should be able to do it in your own time when you can. And not be told that you have to, sorry {participant started to cry}. *(P21, lone parent, one child aged fourteen, wave two)*

There were three main objections to being subject to work-related requirements. Some mothers' resented the control imposed on them, some thought the requirements were too extensive given their caring responsibilities and others felt they were unfair (particularly in light of factors outside of their control such as health conditions and the availability of jobs):

It feels restrictive and it feels very sort of top down rather than sort of person centred I supposed. Erm a little bit sort of patriarchal maybe, sort of we know we know better you know. *(P2, lone parent, two children aged nine and seven, wave two)*

It really annoyed me to be fair, I'm not going to lie because that's hours in the day that I don't really have. *(P22, lone parent, two children aged seven and five, wave two)*

I was frantic, horrified and panicked that it was given to me cos I was had a fit note so I'd've thought that it should not have been given to me. *(P16, lone parent, one child aged four, wave two)*

In line with previous research (BritainThinks, 2018), the mothers who were already in paid work and were being asked to job search for additional hours resented this:

Why should we get you know who are doing the right thing why should we get manipulated [sic] and pin-pointed and put the finger at? *(P6, lone parent, two children aged eight and six, wave two)*

Like so I work sixteen hours. You want me to work twenty-five but I can't quite get there yet but don't tell me I need to be looking on a computer for the nine hours. That's the thing that frustrates me. *(P24, lone parent, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two)*

Some of the participants who were lone parents objected on the grounds that they had claimed Universal Credit on account of difficult relationship breakdown and were not lone parents by choice. One mother who experienced domestic abuse commented:

You feel oh God I've got to go there, I've got to do that, but then you have to and then you know I'm in this situation, I can't help the situation I've been put in. *(P8, lone parent, two children aged thirteen and eleven, wave two)*

Another mother whose husband had committed adultery explained in the context of mandatory work-related requirements:

I mean this whole change in situation hasn't had to affect him at all like he still, he doesn't have to go onto Universal Credit, he still gets to work full-time in

the job he chooses to do an doesn't have any childcare requirements unless he chooses to so that does seem unfair. *(P3, lone parent, two children aged six and three, wave one)*

Conaghan (2009) has commented that there is a lack of recognition within welfare-to-work policies of the fact that women are welfare recipients in large part because they are women (as due to social norms they have disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care). This study shows that one gendered outcome of this lack of recognition within Universal Credit policy is that mothers, and not fathers, are subject to government control following relationship breakdown in families where the father was in paid employment and the mother had taken time out of the paid labour market to care for the couple's dependent children.

Additionally, some of the mothers with experience of a joint Universal Credit claim objected to having work-related requirements if the male partner was undertaking paid work:

In my life...my dad was the one that always went to work and my mum was the one that stayed at home and looked after us and that's just how I think. *(P20, coupled mother, two children aged four and two, wave one)*

An not much pressure on the partner, the girlfriend whatever or the wife to actually go out an because years ago they didn't used to do that. The man used to go out, earn the money. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and six, wave two)*

These comments came from two mothers who were of differing ages (twenty-seven and forty-four respectively) and reflect concerns that the government's attempted shift to the adult worker model wherein both members of a couple are in extensive paid work does not reflect social reality (Lewis, 2002).

Only one participant out of the twenty mothers interviewed at the second wave of interviews explained she did not object to the work-related requirements:

That was fine at the time, well it is because I would expect to have to work that amount of hours to be able to live like you know I'm not a stay at home mum and I have to work. *(P14, lone parent, one child aged eight, wave two)*

This participant was already looking for paid work when she claimed Universal Credit and obtained it within about a week of being subject to job search requirements. Following on from that, she was under the light touch conditionality regime and was not subject in practice to any requirement to increase her earnings.

Overall, the analysis shows that the participants objected to their own personal work-related requirements and resented both the intrusion into their daily lives and the attempt to dictate their work-life balance. The participants often related their objections to their own personal circumstances (such as ill health, their relationship status or their employment status). This finding that the compulsion within Universal Credit is viewed very negatively by claimants with a wide variety of circumstances raises questions as to the extent to which this policy can be effective given claimants' resentment of it. This analysis also reflects the view that the aim within welfare-to-work policies should be to facilitate rather than compel mothers into paid work given they are often best placed to understand an appropriate number of paid work hours in light of their families' circumstances (Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Judge, 2015a) and resent having this dictated to them.

7.5.3 Views on sanctioning mothers

Across the sample, there was a lack of support for sanctioning mothers. At the first wave of interviews, seventeen of the twenty-four mothers unequivocally expressed the view that mothers should not be sanctioned. The main reasons for this centred on the participants' caring responsibilities. A common concern was the fact that sanctions would affect children, who would be negatively impacted through no fault of their own (cf. Johnsen and Blenkinsopp, 2018):

People that have children [should not be sanctioned], that is really cruel because it's not the parent you're starving, it's the child. *(P24, lone mother, three children aged twelve, ten and five, wave one)*

I mean goodness me we've got children to provide for. You're talking about taking money away from you know you're blaming. I mean say for example yes you've got a mum who doesn't want to work and doesn't do any job search, you're penalising her children for that. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

Another key reason for the view that mothers should not be sanctioned was that mothers are already carrying out an important role caring for their children:

They are mothering. They're caring for their children. They are making sure that the home is well managed and that you know the food is being prepared and that their family is being cared for. That is their job. So definitely, why should, why would they be sanctioned? They shouldn't be sanctioned for doing their job. *(P12, coupled mother, two children aged fifteen and six, wave one)*

Some of the participants also expressed concerns about the potential for mothers to unfairly receive sanctions in instances when they are unable to fulfil work-related requirements on account of their caring responsibilities, and some commented on the additional difficulties mothers have in obtaining jobs and fulfilling work-related requirements. One participant explained she did not think mothers should be sanctioned because:

...there's so many factors. Things like children's appointments, illness, trying to fit everything in. *(P23, lone mother, two children aged seven and six, wave one)*

The remaining participants gave more ambivalent views concerning sanctioning mothers. Two of the mothers thought there should be more leeway for mothers in the Universal Credit system in regard to sanctions and one participant thought sanctions should only be applied as a last resort. Another participant stated she did not think mothers should be sanctioned but went on to say that a reduction in payments was appropriate. Three of the participants stated that whether or not mothers should be sanctioned depends on the circumstances. These participants

thought that if mothers were unmotivated or were not putting effort into finding paid work, they should be sanctioned:

I just feel that they've maybe left school, had a baby, and then got into that situation and thought oh well yeah I don't want to go to work, I'm not going to go to work...it's good that they do sanction for that kind of situation. *(P8, lone mother, two children aged thirteen and ten, wave one)*

If they're not meeting it cos they're being lazy then fair but if they're not meeting it because something has happened, like if you sit down and give them an actual reason then they shouldn't just be like, "Well it doesn't matter." *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

The views expressed above were at odds with these participants' objections to the requirement for mothers to undertake paid work, their views on the amount of choice mothers should have regarding their engagement in unpaid care and paid work and also the value they placed on unpaid care. This disjuncture may be down to an internalising of the government and media discourse (cf. Patrick, 2017) as they reflect the dominant 'welfare dependency' narrative in the media and government discourse and the perception that mothers choose to have babies in order to receive benefit payments and avoid undertaking paid work.

Significantly, all of the participants interviewed at the second wave of interviews reported that they had not changed their views on sanctions. For example, one participant explained at the two waves of interviews:

(Wave One) I think it's stupid. I think, I just can't even believe that this is actually going on. What? What? Why are you giving them benefits in the first place?

(Wave Two) I can't see any benefit to anyone having a sanctioned family. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four)*

This further indicates that the capacity for the design of Universal Credit to change claimants' attitudes to paid work and the benefits system has been overestimated. The overall lack of support for sanctioning mothers both across the sample and across time differs from previous research (Dwyer, 2018a; Patrick, 2017) which showed support, in principle, for conditionality albeit it with often strong caveats around personal cases and the current implementation of conditionality in the UK.

There was also a lack of support among the mothers with experience of a joint claim for the way sanctioning operates in couples. All of the mothers objected to the fact that if their partner did not comply with requirements, the whole family would be negatively affected due to the payment into one account:

That's not fair at all. It shouldn't affect everybody else just because one person has done something wrong. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

That shouldn't be like that. Yeah why should both people get sanctioned? Why should we be like cos then that would be taking the money away from me and the children if [partner] can't attend one of his appointments? Why should we get sanctioned? *(P20, coupled mother, two children aged four and two, wave one)*

As also evidenced in Chapter 6.6, this illustrates one gendered issue of the joint claim wherein regardless of whether or not the mother receives the Universal Credit payment, she can be subject to a loss of income if her partner does not comply with requirements and receives a sanction.

Overall, the views of the participants presented in this section combined with the experiences discussed in the two sections above show that most of the participants were subject to a considerable degree of compulsion and objected to this. Particularly in light of the lack of choice the participants felt they had within the Universal Credit system, the analysis furthers concerns about the lack of agency afforded to mothers within the Universal Credit conditionality regime (Whitworth and Griggs, 2013). This finding corresponds with previous research which similarly found

that subjecting claimants to conditionality resulted in a loss of agency (Wright and Patrick, 2019). The current study shows that in the context of families, there is a gendered dimension to this curtailment of agency. Across the sample, whether in a couple relationship or not, the mothers were more likely than the fathers to be subject to the compulsion within the Universal Credit system (as the mothers were disproportionately responsible for unpaid care, they were less likely to be in paid work). This once again demonstrates a lack of recognition of women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and has the gendered outcome of subjecting women, who have historically been denied agency (McNay, 2016), to increasing amounts of surveillance and coercion.

7.6 Responses to the compulsion within Universal Credit over time

As explained above, many participants felt under a great degree of compulsion within the Universal Credit conditionality regime and objected to this. Also, for about half of the participants, the paid work expectations within Universal Credit were incompatible with their personal work-care choices. As welfare claimants are not simply powerless victims, but do and can exercise agency (Wright, Fletcher and Stewart, 2020; Finn, 2018), this section explores the extent to which, and ways in which, the mothers responded to the attempts from the Universal Credit system to dominate their agency in relation to engagement in mandatory work-related activities and paid work. The mothers responded in differing ways to the compulsion within Universal Credit. Three main responses are evident in the findings and some of the mothers exhibited more than one of these responses. The predominant response was to conscientiously comply with the work-related requirements. The vast majority of the participants carried out their work-related requirements (and at times went beyond what was expected of them):

I've been doing basically everything they're been asking me to do. Even when like I was ill I went in cos I was worried about not getting my money.
(P15, lone mother, three children aged eighteen, sixteen and nine, wave one)

I've always stuck to, I've gone to appointments, I've taken their phone calls you know when it's a phone call appointment, I've gone in obviously when on

time, I've submitted sick notes when required. I've done everything that so no I certainly wouldn't risk that anyway because I've got to keep having that money coming at the moment cos it's the only way just for now. *(P8, lone mother, two children aged thirteen and ten, wave one)*

As the above comments indicate, the mothers complied to avoid a sanction. In line with previous research (Wright and Patrick, 2019; Dwyer, 2018b), the fear of being sanctioned was very prevalent across the sample:

There's just this constant kind of anxiety because you don't want to be sanctioned. *(P12, coupled mother, two children aged fifteen and six, wave one)*

Having that hanging over you at any point is quite terrifying. *(P18, lone mother, two children aged fourteen and six, wave one)*

For some participants, the fear of a sanction may have come from their interactions with their work coaches (see Section 7.4). The participants' fear may also have come from the government literature the participants received regarding sanctions. As one participant explained, the Claimant Commitment heavily emphasised the potential for sanctions:

It's sanctions, sanctions, sanctions all over this bloody thing. *(P24, lone mother, three children aged twelve, ten and five, wave one)*

Some of the participants (including some who were in paid work) were frequently required to accept their Claimant Commitments (despite lack of changes to these). Additionally, some of the participants were sent reminders about sanctions and were repeatedly required to read about sanctions (under the threat of sanction for failure to do so) on their online Universal Credit journal. One participant perceived this was a means of ensuring compliance with mandatory work-related requirements:

They upload them every now and again onto the online system and then you get a notification to say there's a letter for you to read and you go and you

read it and it's a letter about sanctions. And there's a real sort of sense that you know maybe they like to sort of keep the warnings going just so you sort of behave yourself and that you remember gosh I need to be doing everything that I'm asked. (*P2, lone mother, two children aged nine and seven, wave two*)

These findings which show that the emphasis on sanctions in the government literature led to fear of sanction and ultimately compliance—despite the lack of referrals for sanctions (see Section 7.4)—reinforce claims that conditionality attempts to discipline and coerce claimants' into fulfilling work-related requirements by instilling fear in claimants (Wright, Fletcher and Stewart, 2020; Wright and Patrick, 2019). One participant's comments reflects this view that the threat of sanctions is used to control claimants' behaviour:

It's [sanctions] just a threat that they make everybody live on. (*P20, two children aged four and two, wave one*)

These findings correspond with those from a previous study investigating the lived experiences of conditionality in Ireland which found that it is the threat of sanction—rather than sanctions themselves—that is used as a mechanism to ensure compliance with work-related requirements (Finn, 2020). The current study shows there is a gendered dimension to the use of the threat of sanction to ensure compliance. Many of the mothers were particularly keen to avoid a sanction because they had either the sole or the vast majority of the responsibility for ensuring their children's material needs were met and were very concerned about the negative impacts of potential sanctions on their children. This indicates there is a failure within Universal Credit not only to recognise mothers' main responsibilities for unpaid caring and domestic labour, but also their role as the main managers of poverty (Lister, 2004), as the fear of sanctions can be particularly pernicious for those with caring responsibilities and results in adverse gendered impacts such as stress and anxiety (see Chapter 5.4).

A second response to the compulsion within Universal Credit which was evident in five of the interviews was for the mothers to make it appear that they were fully

complying with job search requirements, for example by applying for jobs they knew they would not get and reporting job search activities they had not undertaken. Two of the mothers explained regarding recording their job search activity on their work journals:

Right I'll just make this bit up. Cos I thought about doing that. I'll just log that anyway. The thought was there you know. *(P17, lone mother, two children aged six and four, wave one)*

I'm at there trying to present myself on my work journal as being this really productive person. I was trying to organise a litter pick and doing these other projects which I can't even remember now but you know I was trying to get involved and appear like I was doing something without doing anything. *(P16, lone mother, one child aged four, wave one)*

A third response evident in three of the interviews was to overtly not comply with the majority of their work-related requirements. While these mothers did attend mandatory appointments with their work coaches, they did not carry out their job search requirements because they were unable to or because they were opposed to the requirements. One participant who was too ill to carry out her requirements explained:

I haven't spoken to anybody about it. I'm not doing it. *(P7, coupled mother, one child aged five, wave one)*

Another participant did not carry out the requirements to job search because she valued her role as an unpaid carer to her children and did not want paid work at the present time. She explained:

It's difficult to me honestly because I have children. I have to look after them. They need me, I need them. *(P13, lone mother, two children aged seven and five)*

Generally, the differing responses to the compulsion within Universal Credit varied according to certain characteristics within the sample. The middle class mothers tended to conscientiously comply with requirements and in some cases go beyond the requirements of Universal Credit. For many of these mothers this was the first time they had engaged with the benefits system and they were particularly anxious to comply with requirements and avoid a sanction. Additionally, their cultural and social capital may also have meant they found it easier to fulfil, and therefore comply with, work-related and administrative requirements (see Section 6.6). Also, as explained in Section 7.4, these mothers evaded some of the forms of compulsion within the Universal Credit conditionality regime by engaging in self-employed work and this may also have meant it was easier for them to comply with their requirements. The mothers who did not comply with the mandatory work-related requirements were the furthest from the paid labour market (for example due to health conditions or lack of qualifications, work experience or formal childcare) and some also had the strongest objections to the expectation to undertake paid work. Unlike many of the middle class mothers, these mothers were not able to evade aspects of conditionality by drawing upon their cultural and social capital to become self-employed.

The longitudinal aspect of the study showed that over time, there was little change in how the participants responded to the compulsion within Universal Credit. The main response was conscientious compliance followed by apparent compliance. The data below demonstrates the consistency of the participants' responses:

(Wave One) I just kind of have to stretch it out an you know and there's a job in [shop]...it's food and stuff so I wouldn't be able to lift the heavy boxes but I've got an application form that I'm going to hand in just so I can say to them you know I have applied for this job and you know chances are I wouldn't get it because I can't do the you know the requirements so yeah it just comes to a point where if I see a job I just kind of apply for it just to add on the hours I've been looking.

(Wave Two) I'm just on the internet making up the time and finding jobs that I'm applying for and I might not get it because I might not meet the criteria but

at least I've told them that I've applied for it. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen)*

(Wave One) I want to just follow the rules of what I'm meant to be doing and obviously ideally just be self-sufficient and make enough money anyway.

(Wave Two) I just want to follow the rules that are already set out and just yeah not cause any like attention {both laugh} to myself. *(P3, lone mother, two children aged six and three)*

While the above participant was very conscientious about attending appointments and attending to mandatory administrative tasks, she along with another self-employed participant deliberately misreported her income in order to make it look as though she had reached the MIF. These participants therefore used their agency in order to circumvent the minimum earnings rules and ensure they did not experience a reduction in income.

Two of the participants who did not comply with work-related requirements at the first wave of interviews did not take part in a second interview and therefore their responses over time were not documented. The third participant, who did not comply previously on account of her caring responsibilities, did comply more at the second wave of interviews due to the increased threat of sanction for non-compliance (discussed in Section 7.4):

Now on I was worry they can cut my money and I find now on finally I get something and writing everything they told me to do I do it. *(P13, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave two)*

However, while this participant was complying with mandatory work-related requirements at the second wave of interviews, she still did not want a job and on being asked if she would try to get a job she answered:

When my children grown up I have someone to help me at home, I can look. But if I don't have someone to help me at home, I can't do it. I need my

certificates first. Improve my English, learn my children the best way. (*P13, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave two*)

Similarly, at the second wave of interviews another participant who reported that she was searching for jobs, later explained that even though she could increase her hours to twenty-five as was required of her, she would not be doing this on account of the negative implications for her finances and caring responsibilities:

I was up coughing my head off last night and do you know what I was thinking while I was up, while I was on my phone? Oh I better apply for jobs just so that I could put into my journal because I didn't want to lie and say I'm not. I applied for two more jobs at two am this morning...

...I'm doing the job search and I think if I wanted to I could go up to the twenty-five but I'm penalised too much for it. Yeah. The difference in the wage would be taken off in the free school meals. So no. And then if I did that I'd be contracted at that where I'm a zero now. I'd be contracted at that and say the kids are sick, they'd be no flexibility. (*P24, lone mother, three children aged thirteen, ten and five, wave two*)

Research conducted by NatCen for the DWP also found that while the conditionality within Universal Credit drove compliance among claimants, at times this was not productive (DWP, 2017b). Therefore, there are indications that while the compulsion within Universal Credit can change claimants' job search behaviour, it does not always lead to concerted efforts to obtain paid work if claimants do not want to undertake paid work, or more paid work, at the current time. This suggests the Theory of Change behind Universal Credit (see Chapter 3.2.2) has considerable limitations. More broadly, this raises questions about the behaviourism underpinning conditionality (see Chapter 2.3) as this study shows that at times only a superficial, non-productive compliance is triggered. This indicates there are limits to the influence behaviouristic policies can exert and therefore also limits to the extent they can achieve their intended outcomes.

Overall, the findings presented above show that the main response to the compulsion within Universal Credit is conscientious compliance. Previous research has also shown that while demonstrating a variety of responses to conditionality, claimants' predominant response is acquiescence (Wright, Fletcher and Stewart, 2020). In the current study, this response was due to fear of sanction perpetuated in part by the emphasis on sanctions in the Claimant Commitments and other government literature. This fear was exacerbated by the mothers' responsibilities for ensuring their children's material needs were met. The findings also demonstrate that some participants used their agency to maintain their work-care choices by appearing to comply, or not complying, with work-related requirements. Additionally, some participants complied with work-related activities stipulated in their Claimant Commitments and with directives from work coaches, but did not follow the overall requirements to enter paid work and increase earnings. Prior research has similarly found that despite the considerable constraints of welfare conditionality policies, claimants can and do act according to their own interests (Finn, 2018). The analysis also shows that while at the first wave of interviews the middle class mothers were the most likely to comply with work-related requirements, at the second some were resisting the increased compulsion of the MIF by misreporting their earnings. The data is limited over time concerning the participants who overtly did not comply with requirements. However, there are suggestions that as none of the participants were overtly engaged in non-compliance at the second wave of interviews, perhaps due to the increased compulsion those who did not comply faced (see Section 7.4), such resistance was hard to maintain. While this may have meant that these participants' agency was dominated in regard to carrying out work-related requirements, some still used their agency to resist the overall requirement to enter paid work. These outcomes are discussed further in the next section.

7.7 Overall impacts on the participants' agency

The compulsion within the Universal Credit conditionality regime and the mothers' responses to this had impacts on the mothers' agency in regard to engagement in work-related requirements and paid work. In terms of the work-related requirements, for the vast majority of the participants, being subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit resulted in them engaging in activities that they would not have

otherwise chosen to do. These activities included attending appointments at the JCP, carrying out extensive online job search, reporting job search activity on their Universal Credit journals, applying for jobs they could not do, taking part in mandatory training activities and fulfilling online administration and tasks. Two of the participants commented:

I don't want to waste time applying for jobs I'm not going to do or have a job that I don't want to do when I could be finding or getting the actual job that I would stay in for the foreseeable future. *(P18, lone mother, two children aged fourteen and six, wave one)*

It's just getting me to do silly things. And you know it's bad enough that I'm, well before my sick note, having to spend ten hours trying to find jobs and then I'm having to do these tasks as well. *(P21, lone mother, one child aged fourteen, wave two)*

As the above comments show, a main reason that the participants did not choose to engage in their work-related requirements from their own volition is that they did not think they were helpful, or thought they were counterproductive, in moving them into paid work (cf. Patrick, 2017). As explained in the sections above, those who were unemployed and subject to job search requirements were subject to more directives and monitoring and therefore were particularly likely to have to engage in such activities against their choice.

More broadly, the conditionality within Universal Credit and the mothers' responses to it had varying impacts on the mothers' agency in relation to their engagement in paid work and unpaid care. As explored above, some of the mothers resisted the compulsion within Universal Credit and avoided entering paid work (or increasing their paid work hours). Additionally, five of the mothers who entered paid work since the start of their Universal Credit claim had wanted to start paid work immediately and obtained jobs of hours and types in line with their work-care choices. As there was alignment between the paid-work expectations of Universal Credit and these mothers' choices, their agency was not dominated as one mother explained:

I am lucky in that I have never felt that I'm being made to do something that I don't want to do...I've never been forced into situations by the benefit system that meant that I felt they were making me work when I'd rather be with my son. *(P14, lone mother, one child aged eight, wave two)*

However, partly as a result of the compulsion within Universal Credit, four of the mothers entered paid work sooner than they had wanted to. For three of these participants this went against their preferences for undertaking unpaid care and for one it was because of her caring responsibilities and her studies. Two of these mothers explained:

I feel like I've been pushed into work really you know cos she was saying you will have to, when he turns five and this was before he was five. *(P6, lone mother, two children aged eight and five, wave one)*

I think if it was my choice then I probably would have waited a little bit longer just so that, cos I'm stressed a lot and my kids see that so yeah I probably just maybe would waited a little bit longer. *(P22, lone parent, two children aged seven and five, wave two)*

The government may perceive this to be evidence of a successful and effective policy in that for these women, the conditionality arguably was a factor in them obtaining paid work (three of the four of these mothers were among those who considered that the conditionality within Universal Credit had played a role in their moves into paid work as discussed in Chapter 6.7.2). However, in addition to denying these women agency, this had detrimental impacts on their caring responsibilities and these mothers entered low-paid, insecure, gendered jobs. The paid work requirements also affected the mothers' agency in regard to their engagement in paid work in other ways. Due to the compulsion within Universal Credit, three of the mothers were working longer hours than they wanted given their caring responsibilities, one had to change from self-employment to employment against her choice and one mother entered a low level job rather than take her time to obtain a job that would help her establish her career. It also routinely constrained the mothers' ability to pursue their long-term career aspirations (see Chapter 6).

Overall, for some mothers the work-related expectations of Universal Credit aligned with their work-care choices and therefore did not dominate their agency, and others used their agency to resist engagement in paid work (or increased engagement in paid work). However, for others, the outcome of the policy was engagement in paid work that went against their choices, particularly in terms of when these mothers entered paid work and how much paid work they undertook. Significantly, for the majority of these mothers, their employment outcomes conflicted with their commitment to unpaid care. This confirms concerns regarding the potential for compulsion to force mothers to do what they consider to be morally wrong (Barlow, Duncan and James, 2002). This study also shows that rather than establishing the right to care so citizens can have genuine choice about their engagement in unpaid care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997), this policy denies some women the choice to care. While the participants with less cultural and social capital and more barriers to paid work were more likely to be compelled into undertaking mandatory work-related activities against their choices, this study found that ultimately, mothers across the sociodemographic spectrum were compelled into employment that was incompatible with their work-care choices.

7.8 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter shows that typically, mothers experience a considerable amount of compulsion within the Universal Credit conditionality regime. The participants' Claimant Commitments were on the whole imposed rather than negotiated. While the participants were subject to varying degrees of directives and monitoring from their work coaches, other aspects of the conditionality regime such as the threat of sanction resulted in the participants feeling subject to considerable pressure and perceiving that they lacked choice in regard to engagement in unpaid care and paid work. There was some variation across the sample in that those with easements generally faced less stringent compulsion initially; however, as they tended to remain unemployed (see Chapter 6.7) they were often subject to prolonged and increased compulsion over time. Those with the least amount of cultural and social capital and who were furthest from the paid labour market experienced the greatest amount of intrusion regarding routine work-related requirements. The mothers with higher levels of cultural and social capital were

subject to fewer directives and less scrutiny particularly in the first year of their claim due to their self-employed status. However, being subject to the MIF after their start-up period resulted in a considerable amount of compulsion regarding the level of earnings they reached. The findings also suggest that in differing ways, compulsion increased over time across the sample. Most of the mothers responded to the compulsion by complying with work-related requirements; however, others resisted the compulsion through apparent compliance, overt non-compliance or non-productive compliance.

The finding that mothers subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit experience considerable amounts of compulsion highlights problems with the paternalistic justification for conditionality. The study shows that using the threat of sanction to attempt to make benefit claimants behave in ways the government considers best for them infantilises people (Standing, 2011). This is not only ethically objectionable but also highlights the inherent contradiction wherein conditionality aims to make more responsible citizens through compelling them into paid work yet through this compulsion disempowers them, which may be a contributing factor to the inefficacy of this policy (see Chapter 6). This is particularly problematic given that those furthest from the paid labour market were subject to the highest levels of intrusion. Additionally, the findings show there was a considerable mismatch between the government's use of coercion and the participants' views and feelings on this which contradicts Mead's (1997c) claim that those subject to paternalism adhere to the values being imposed and that conditionality closes the gap between intentions and behaviour (see Chapter 2.3.2).

The analysis also shows the conditionality within Universal Credit has wider implications for women's citizenship. The study demonstrates that the conditionality limits women's ability to exercise choice and reduces their control over their daily lives, mainly in relation to carrying out work-related requirements and but also in terms of their engagement in unpaid care and paid work. It can deny women the choice to undertake unpaid care and also limits women's ability to pursue their chosen career aspirations. Therefore, rather than expand women's ability to exercise agency so that they can engage in unpaid care and participate in the paid labour market more fully in line with a gender inclusive concept of citizenship, this

policy further limits it. Consequently, this study strengthens claims that conditionality policies reinforce structures of subordination (Goodin, 2002) and shows that this occurs in relation to gender as women—who already face considerable constraints on their agency—are subject to patriarchal control from the state.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's citizenship. Historically and currently, women have routinely held a marginalised position in gendered citizenship frameworks (see Chapter 2.2). The central duty of citizenship has long been viewed as paid work and the citizen is perceived in masculine terms: as an economically independent wage earner unrestricted by caring responsibilities. Unpaid care has not been viewed as a primary citizenship contribution. While women have entered the paid labour market in significant numbers since the 1980s, women's citizenship status remains precarious due to persistent gender inequalities in the paid labour market caused in part by women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care (Lister, 2003). Consequently, some feminists (for example, Lister, 2003; Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Cass, 1994) have conceptualised a more gender inclusive citizenship framework that supports both women's participation in the paid labour market and their roles as unpaid carers. Enlarging women's ability to exercise agency so that they can pursue engagement in unpaid care and paid work is a key aspect of creating a gender inclusive citizenship framework.

However, in the UK and beyond there has been an increasing application of conditionality and concerns have been raised that this policy measure devalues women's caring roles (Cain, 2016; Davies, 2015; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Deacon and Patrick, 2011; Grabham and Smith, 2010; Conaghan, 2009), exacerbates women's disadvantaged position in the paid labour market (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011; MacLeavy, 2011; Grabham and Smith, 2010; Grover, 2007; MacLeavy, 2007) and limits women's agency regarding engagement in paid work and unpaid care (Millar, 2019; Rafferty and Wiggan, 2017; Davies, 2015, 2012; Whitworth and Griggs, 2013; Grabham and Smith, 2010), contrary to a gender inclusive citizenship framework. The introduction of Universal Credit in the UK entails the most intensive and extensive application of conditionality to date (Wright and Dwyer, 2020; Dwyer and Wright, 2014) (see Chapters 2.2 and 3.3). Therefore,

the three research objectives and related research questions (see Chapter 1.4) concerned the impacts of this policy over time on the valuing of unpaid care, women's position in the paid labour market and women's agency in relation to engagement in unpaid care and paid work.

Drawing on the original analysis presented in Chapters five to seven, this concluding chapter highlights the key findings and ultimately argues that rather than help to reconceptualise citizenship so that it is more inclusive of women, the conditionality within Universal Credit furthers an androcentric concept of citizenship and thereby exacerbates women's precarious position in dominant citizenship frameworks. Section 8.2 provides an overall summary of the research. Section 8.3 discusses the implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for women's citizenship and Section 8.4 outlines the arising policy recommendations. Section 8.5 articulates the contribution of the study and presents suggestions for future research.

8.2 Research summary

The research findings demonstrate that the concerns raised in the literature relating to women's citizenship are applicable to the conditionality regime for main carers of children within Universal Credit. This section shows how the research questions were answered and also discusses the variation in the participants' experiences and views.

8.2.1 Effects on mothers' caring roles and responsibilities across time

The research shows that within Universal Credit policy and practice there is an almost exclusive emphasis on paid work and a routine failure to recognise and take into account mothers' caring responsibilities (see Chapter 5). As a result, mandatory expectations of work-related requirements and paid work hinder mothers' ability to deliver unpaid care by limiting time to undertake unpaid care and increasing tensions in interactions with children. The longitudinal aspect of the study has shown that these impacts are sustained over time and are often exacerbated by entrance into paid work. The challenges in taking children to appointments at the JCP also undermine mothers' caring responsibilities and roles. Additionally, there were

indications that the conditionality erodes mothers' caring identities as some of the participants experienced shame and stigma on account of undertaking unpaid care. This emphasis on paid work to the detriment of unpaid care and caring identities devalues unpaid care.

8.2.2 Effects on mothers' employment trajectories

The longitudinal analysis shows that the conditionality within Universal Credit has limited positive impacts on mothers' employment trajectories. A significant proportion of the participants did not enter paid work and there was a distinct lack of progression in the paid labour market over time (see Chapter 6). While some of the participants had moved into paid work since the start of their Universal Credit claim, they were more likely to attribute their entrance into paid work to their motivation and efforts rather than the conditionality within Universal Credit. Furthermore, the majority of these participants entered gendered, low-paid, insecure, part-time work regardless of education level, and some did not sustain paid work. This suggests that the Universal Credit conditionality regime does not support women in obtaining jobs that improve their disadvantaged position in the paid labour market. There were also indications that the 'work-first' approach inherent within the Universal Credit regime furthers women's disadvantaged labour market position as it resulted in some mothers taking the first job available regardless of compatibility with education, experience and caring responsibilities and limited some of the mothers' opportunities for long-term career planning and training. Key contributing factors to the lack of sustained moves into secure, adequately-paid work and the lack of increases in earnings were the severe difficulties in accessing the formal childcare provision within Universal Credit and the absence of substantive employment-related support provided by work coaches and the JCP.

8.2.3 Experiences of, and responses to, compulsion over time

The research demonstrates that mothers experience a considerable amount of compulsion within the Universal Credit conditionality regime (see Chapter 7). While some participants resisted this compulsion, the majority complied with work-related requirements. The compulsion was particularly evident in the lack of negotiation

when the Claimant Commitment was formed and the mandatory requirement to undertake paid work or increase earnings backed by sanctions and the MIF. For some participants, interactions with work coaches added to the compulsion they experienced. The longitudinal aspect of the study showed that the amount of compulsion the participants experienced increased over time across the sample and indicated that subsequently, resistance to compulsion is difficult to maintain. Overall, the conditionality within Universal Credit limits women's ability to exercise agency in regard to engagement in work-related requirements, unpaid care and paid work, and particularly denies mothers the choice to undertake unpaid care.

8.2.4 Variation in experiences and views

While the answers to the research questions discussed above give the overall experiences and views of the mothers within the sample, there was some notable variation in experiences according primarily to the social class of the participants, whether or not they had an easement and the discretion exercised by the participants work coaches. The study found that the middle class participants were able to draw on their social and cultural capital mainly to their advantage within the Universal Credit conditionality regime. The middle class mothers tended to opt for self-employed status within the Universal Credit system whereas the working class mothers were more likely to be job searching or employed. Consequently, the middle class mothers were more able to fit their paid work around their caring responsibilities whereas the employed working class mothers did not have this flexibility. As a result, the caring responsibilities of the working class mothers were more adversely affected by entrance into paid work (see Chapter 5.4). Additionally, during the first year of their claim, the self-employed mothers were generally subject to less directives and monitoring from their work coaches than the participants who were job searching (however, over time, in some ways the compulsion increased for the middle class mothers as after the one year start-up period, they became subject to the MIF) (see Chapter 7.4). There were also indications from the study that the social and cultural capital of the middle class mothers influenced the ease with which they were able to navigate the Universal Credit system (see Chapter 6). The middle class mothers were more likely to have positive relationships with their work coaches whereas the working class mothers tended to feel disrespected. Additionally, the

middle class mothers found the administration requirements of Universal Credit easier to fulfil than the working class mothers.

While the middle class mothers were able to accrue some advantages on account of their social and cultural capital, the differences in employment outcomes for the middle class and working class mothers were not as stark as expected given class-based differences in employment in the wider population (see Chapter 2.2.1). Some of the middle class mothers who had started their businesses before claiming Universal Credit were engaged in higher status and more highly paid work. However, the middle class mothers who entered self-employment or paid work since claiming Universal Credit were generally engaged either solely or partially in gendered, low status, low-paid work, akin to the working class participants who entered paid work since claiming Universal Credit (see Chapter 6.7). Despite the higher hourly wage of some of the self-employed participants, the longitudinal aspect of the study showed all of the self-employed mothers struggled to meet the MIF (see Chapter 6.6). Also, all of the participants were still in receipt of Universal Credit at the second wave of interviews, which indicates that participants across the class spectrum struggled to increase earnings and achieve the progression in the paid labour market that Universal Credit is designed to stimulate. This highlights the difficulties low-income mothers face in reconciling unpaid care with paid work, and engaging in the gendered paid labour market, regardless of social and cultural capital.

Similarly, the mothers with easements also reported positive experiences in regard to some aspects of their Universal Credit claim; however, there was variation as to the effects of these positive experiences on overall outcomes. The mothers with easements were more likely to report their caring responsibilities had been taken into account when work-related requirements were set by their work coaches and on an ongoing basis (see Chapter 5.3). Consequently, they were among the minority of mothers who did not think their caring responsibilities had been negatively impacted by their work-related requirements at the first wave of interviews. The mothers with easements were also more likely to have positive relationships with their work coaches and to express the view at the first wave of interviews that Universal Credit had brought them closer to paid work (see Chapter 6.7.2). However, investigating

employment outcomes across time showed that the mothers who either currently or previously had an easement were less likely to obtain paid work. Additionally, while the mothers with easements tended to report that the Claimant Commitment had been negotiated and that they received more leniency and understanding regarding ongoing enforcement of work-related requirements, they still felt that they were under an objectionable degree of compulsion within the Universal Credit conditionality regime and resented being subject to mandatory work-related requirements (see Chapter 7.5.2).

The role of the participants' work coaches also gave rise to differences in experiences of, and views on, the Universal Credit conditionality regime across the sample. There was variation in the extent to which caring responsibilities were taken into account during ongoing interactions with work coaches and this influenced the mothers' perceptions of whether unpaid care is valued within the Universal Credit system (see Chapter 5.3.2 and 5.5.2). Also, some of the participants had particularly positive relationships with their work coaches and this had an impact on the mothers' overall experiences of Universal Credit; for example, three of the four mothers who reported a positive experience of Universal Credit attributed this to their work coaches (see Chapter 6.5.1). Additionally, there were differences in how, and the extent to which, the participants' work-related requirements were enforced on an ongoing basis by their work coaches (see Chapter 7.4). As a result, some participants felt supported in their work-care choices by their work coaches whereas others were subject to high levels of surveillance and intrusion.

However, for the most part, the discretion of the work coaches had a limited impact on the overall experiences and views of the mothers as other elements of the system significantly influenced how the mothers were affected by the conditionality within Universal Credit. For example, while some of the work coaches did not enforce work-related requirements, most of the participants experienced considerable levels of pressure within the Universal Credit system and perceived that they lacked choice in regard to engagement in unpaid care and paid work due to the overall sanction-backed expectation to enter paid work or increase earnings (see Chapter 7). Additionally, the study found that the work coaches did not use the extent of the discretion afforded to them (see Chapter 5.3). While the Universal Credit literature

emphasises the role of the work coach in personalising work-related requirements (DWP, 2011a, 2010c), the research demonstrates that work-related requirements are not routinely tailored to caring responsibilities. This may be due to constraints faced by work coaches, a lack of knowledge of how to tailor requirements and also a lack of awareness of the extent of the discretion afforded to them. This is problematic as it often resulted in work-related requirements that were incompatible with caring responsibilities and therefore difficult to fulfil. The next section turns to the broader implications of such overall outcomes for women's citizenship.

8.3 Gendered citizenship implications

This study has found that the conditionality within Universal Credit hinders attempts to create a gender inclusive citizenship framework. Rather than increasing the recognition of unpaid care as a valid citizenship contribution, it further devalues it by promoting the gendered notion that paid work is the primary duty of citizenship. Whereas previously some (inferior) unconditional social rights were allocated based on caring responsibilities (see Chapter 2.2.1), citizenship is increasingly conceptualised in terms of duties (Skevik, 2005). By making mothers' access to social rights conditional on extended and intensified paid-work related behaviour, the conditionality within Universal Credit continues the erosion of the former recognition of unpaid care. This study confirms claims that activation policies introduce a shift in women's social citizenship as they demand women's participation in the paid labour market as their citizenship contribution and neglect unpaid care (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011; Skevik, 2005). This is highly problematic given the social and economic value of unpaid care (see Chapter 2.2) and the value mothers attach to their unpaid caring roles as evidenced in this study and others (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2016; Gillies, 2007; Duncan and Edwards, 1999). As mothers remain disproportionately responsible for unpaid care and are regularly left with the sole responsibility for this, the Universal Credit conditionality regime fails to recognise interdependency and devalues the necessary caring roles and responsibilities mothers carry out (see Chapter 5). Therefore, this conditionality furthers mothers' exclusion, reduces the recognition they obtain, erodes their social identity and weakens their social positioning by diminishing their caring subjectivities

(cf. Kingfisher, 2002) rather than recognising and valuing unpaid care as an essential and valid citizenship contribution (see Chapters 2 and 5).

While policies that seek to increase mothers' engagement in the paid labour market have the potential to increase mothers' financial independence, and their recognition, social standing and access to social rights obtained through paid work, this study shows that the conditionality within Universal Credit does not help mothers acquire these. A key issue is the failure to address women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, and at times to exacerbate this (discussed further below in relation to the joint claim). While there is an attempt within Universal Credit policy to achieve this through increasing help with formal childcare costs, this study shows the inadequacy of this measure and also the impossibility of completely commodifying care (see Chapters 2.2.2, 5.5.1 and 6.4). A second significant and related issue is the failure to help women overcome gender inequalities in the paid labour market. Instead, as this study has shown, the Universal Credit conditionality regime is largely ineffective in helping mothers enter secure, sustainable, adequately-paid jobs and progress in paid work, and can be detrimental to long-term job prospects through the emphasis on getting claimants into any paid work quickly (see Chapter 6). Conditionality thereby expects unemployed main carers of children to participate in, and uphold, gender inequalities in the paid labour market (Edmiston, 2018). Therefore, current conditionality policy and practice demands women obtain their citizenship status on the same terms as men through entering paid work without recognising women's caring responsibilities and their different position in the paid labour market. Consequently, the conditionality within Universal Credit does not facilitate women's attempts to obtain full citizenship status in its current gendered form and at times impedes these through exacerbating gender inequalities in the paid labour market.

This study also shows that the conditionality within Universal Credit limits women's agency in regard to engagement in unpaid care and paid work (although some women resist this to an extent). Within Universal Credit policy, mothers are denied the choice to undertake unpaid care from when the youngest child is aged three (see Chapter 7). This contributes towards the failure to recognise and value women's unpaid caring contributions. The conditionality regime also denies mothers a certain

amount of control over their paid work decisions, for example by curtailing their pursuit of long-term career aspirations, which thereby limits their ability to improve their position in the paid labour market as discussed above. These constraints placed on women's agency accelerate a notable shift in policy. There was a period prior to the late 1990s when the British welfare state afforded women the choice (albeit a constrained one) between working and mothering (Letablier, Eydoux and Betzelt, 2011). However, policies implemented from New Labour's time in office onwards have increasingly compelled women to be paid workers (see Chapter 3.3) and this compulsion has culminated in the introduction of Universal Credit. Therefore, rather than enlarge women's agency to help create a recognition of unpaid care and support women's participation in the paid labour market, the conditionality within Universal Credit limits women's agency and therefore inhibits a key means of creating a more gender inclusive citizenship framework.

There are also specific implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit for the citizenship rights of coupled women. The joint claim involves a single payment into one bank account and both members of a couple have to fulfil their work-related requirements to maintain the household's full entitlement to Universal Credit. As evidenced in this study, a mother can lose her entire entitlement to Universal Credit payments due to the actions of her partner (see Chapter 6.6). Therefore, the joint liability for fulfilling work-related requirements within the Universal Credit joint claim results in a weakening of social rights for coupled mothers as their access to benefit payments is now conditional not only on their behaviour, but also on that of their partners. This is particularly problematic given that women have more of the responsibility for ensuring their children's material needs are met (Sung and Bennett, 2007). As this study shows, an additional gendered outcome of this is that coupled women help their partners fulfil their work-related requirements (see Chapter 6.6). This takes place in the context of the requirement for couples to nominate a 'lead carer'. The study conducted by Griffiths et al. (2020) investigating Universal Credit, couples and money found that the woman was nominated the lead carer in twenty-seven out of the thirty couples with dependent children and that some of the participants objected to this policy on the grounds that it is incompatible with a more gender equal distribution of unpaid care. Therefore, within couples, Universal Credit policy can both entrench and exacerbate the current gendered division of unpaid

responsibilities within households to the detriment of women's levels of stress and tiredness, and also their ability to participate in the paid labour market and therefore obtain citizenship status.

Of considerable concern, the negative impacts and implications of the conditionality within Universal Credit discussed above are only pertinent to mothers on low incomes. Mothers who do not need to claim Universal Credit due to the level of their own or their partners' earnings, or whose household earnings are consistently above the relevant CET (see Chapter 3.3.2), are exempt from work-related requirements. The conditionality within Universal Credit subsequently devalues the unpaid care carried out by mothers who are on the lowest incomes in society. These mothers are not deemed to be making a valid citizenship contribution whereas wealthier mothers who look after their children full-time do not receive the censure of 'irresponsible citizen' as they are considered self-sufficient through virtue of their partners' incomes. The study also indicates that the conditionality within Universal Credit weakens low-income women's position in the paid labour market thereby adding to inequalities between women (see Chapter 2.2) and failing to help these women obtain citizenship status through paid work. Additionally, as Harrison and Sanders have argued, there is a "social division of social control" (2014, p.11) whereby governments apply the most coercive measures aimed at changing behaviour to the poorest members of society (cf. Dwyer, 1998). This is evident within Universal Credit policy, as the coercion to enter paid work is only experienced by those on the lowest incomes and not by all mothers in society. Specifically regarding the choice to carry out unpaid care, the study reinforces concerns that welfare-to-work policies result in disparities of care whereby poor families are particularly denied the right to give unpaid care (Haylett, 2003). Therefore, this study contributes to claims that prevailing welfare-to-work policy "risks positioning impoverished lone mothers 'under erasure', invisible as mothers or moral citizens, and visible only as low waged worker citizens" (Pulkingham, Fuller and Kershaw, 2010, p.267) and shows that due to the introduction of Universal Credit, this also applies to low-income coupled mothers.

In demonstrating how the conditionality within Universal Credit hinders attempts to create a more gender inclusive version of citizenship, this study highlights

deficiencies in current gendered conceptions of citizenship. It shows the persistent difficulties low-income mothers have in obtaining full citizenship status on the same terms as men and the problems with sidelining unpaid care. Therefore, the findings from this study further the argument that citizenship needs to be re-conceptualised to be inclusive of women (Pascall, 2012; Lister, 2003; Cass, 1994; Pateman, 1989). As demonstrated in this study, unpaid care is an essential and valuable contribution that entails hard work and non-commodifiable relational and affective aspects (see Chapter 5). Since engaging in unpaid care currently results in a reduction in citizenship status (Knijn and Kremer, 1997), citizenship needs to be re-defined so that unpaid care is viewed as a valid citizenship contribution (Pateman, 2005; Tronto, 2001; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Knijn and Kremer, 1997). Under this citizenship framework, carrying out unpaid care would accrue social rights and respect akin to paid employment (Cantillon and Lynch, 2017; Pascall, 2012; Fraser and Gordon, 1994). To help bring about a comprehensive valuing of unpaid care, the concept of the independent wage earner needs to be deconstructed and replaced with the recognition of interdependency which highlights that everybody needs to give and receive unpaid care at some point in their lives (Lynch and Lyons, 2009a; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Knijn and Kremer, 1997). For unpaid care to be valued practically, time to care and financial resources are needed (Cantillon and Lynch, 2017; Lynch and Walsh, 2009; Williams, 2001).

Establishing the value of unpaid care does not entail diminishing the importance of women's engagement in paid work as within a gender inclusive framework, this remains a key citizenship contribution (Knijn and Kremer, 1997). While participating in paid work can accrue financial rewards, for the mothers of this study these gains were slight, confirming claims that merely inserting women into the paid labour market does not guarantee more gender equal outcomes (Annesley, Gains and Rummery, 2010). This study therefore shows that gender inequalities in the paid labour market and women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care need to be addressed so that there can be more parity between women (from across the sociodemographic spectrum) and men in terms of participating in, and obtaining the rewards from, paid work (Pascall, 2012; Lister, 2003; Cass, 1994). This includes combating gendered horizontal and vertical occupational segregation and the gender pay gap, redistributing responsibility for unpaid care from women to men and state,

and prioritising the reconciliation of unpaid care and paid work for both men and women (Pascall, 2012; Lister, 2003; Fraser, 1998; Orloff, 1993).

Equipping women with the ability to exercise agency regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work is fundamental to this gender inclusive citizenship framework. For unpaid care to be recognised as a valid citizenship contribution, mothers need to be able to choose to carry out unpaid care (Williams, 2001; Knijn and Kremer, 1997). However, similarly, as paid work is also a valid citizenship contribution, mothers should be equally able to choose to engage fully in paid work (Lewis and Giullari, 2005). Enlarging women's agency requires providing the right to care (Knijn and Kremer, 1997) and also the conditions that enable women to make genuine choices regarding unpaid care and paid work (see Chapter 2.2.3). Affording women with the agency to engage in unpaid care and paid work also helps meet the needs of women in their diversity and recognises the life course by enabling women to vary their intensity of engagement in paid work according to their changing circumstances. The next section discusses how Universal Credit and wider government policy can be adapted and implemented to promote a more gender inclusive concept of citizenship.

8.4 Policy recommendations

This study has led to the development of policy recommendations for the Universal Credit conditionality regime that aim to increase the recognition of mothers' caring responsibilities, promote mothers' position in the paid labour market and reduce the current limits placed on their agency. The majority of these recommendations are based on the participants' answers to an interview question regarding how Universal Credit could be improved for them as mothers. Many of the participants expressed the view that personal circumstances, including caring responsibilities, need to be taken into consideration when work-related requirements are set and on an ongoing basis. Suggestions for achieving this include re-instating specialist parent advisors who have an in-depth understanding of caring responsibilities (Dwyer, 2018a), allowing more time to develop genuinely tailored Claimant Commitments while ensuring claimants still receive Universal Credit payments (SSAC, 2019) and compiling a standard set of questions that work coaches ask claimants when forming

their Claimant Commitments to ensure appropriate easements are applied (Work and Pensions Committee, 2018a). Additionally, providing work coaches with time to review work-related requirements on an ongoing basis would help to ensure these are appropriate to claimants' changing circumstances (Dwyer, 2018a). There is also a necessity to ensure Claimant Commitments are mutually composed rather than imposed by work coaches. Having a two-stage process for accepting the Claimant Commitment so that claimants have time to consider whether requirements are appropriate may help achieve this (Economic Affairs Committee, 2020). Some of the participants also considered the standard expected number of job search hours should be lowered as they felt they were unrealistic and inherently lack recognition of the multitude of activities involved in caring for children and the time and energy this requires.

Another key recommendation arising from the study is the need for a shift in emphasis from sanctions to support (Economic Affairs Committee, 2020; Dwyer, 2018a). More meaningful employment-related support is particularly important for mothers given their disadvantaged labour market position and the difficulties some mothers experience in re-entering the paid labour market after a period of time caring for children (see Chapter 6.3). Re-instating specialist parent advisors would help to achieve this aim due to their increased understanding of the barriers parents face in obtaining and sustaining paid work (Graham and McQuaid, 2014). Other ways of implementing this recommendation include ensuring work-search review appointments are of a sufficient duration to allow for individualised support (Dwyer, 2018a) and incorporating discussions between claimants and their work coaches about long-term career goals and ensuring these are reflected in the Claimant Commitment on an ongoing basis (SSAC, 2019). The study's findings concerning the virtual system whereby claimants interact with work coaches online and are assigned work-related tasks also needs to be re-considered given the lack of personalisation, lack of feedback for the tasks and perceived futility of them (see Chapters 6.5 and 7.7). Additionally, self-employed claimants would benefit from a more flexible approach to reporting earnings (potentially including a longer reporting period) and an increase in the duration of the start-up period (Work and Pensions Committee, 2018c).

The study also highlighted the need for the issues with the formal childcare provision within Universal Credit to be addressed as in many cases these did not facilitate the entrance and maintenance of paid work (see Chapter 6.4). The process whereby claimants have to pay for their childcare costs upfront at the beginning of the claim and claim costs in arrears on an ongoing basis needs to be changed. Options for achieving this include the DWP paying childcare costs to claimants in advance of the care being provided or paying childcare costs directly to childcare providers (Work and Pensions Committee, 2018b). Additionally, communication regarding the formal provision measures should be improved. Mothers need to be informed of how much help with childcare costs they are entitled to and, if relevant, given help in calculating these costs when job opportunities arise. A further area for improvement is the JCP environment (see Chapter 5.4.2). Several of the participants commented that having a children's area with a selection of toys and books would go a long way to making the JCP environment more child-friendly and supportive. Consideration should also be given to the availability of toilet facilities and also the difficulties of negotiating staircases with a child in a pushchair.

As this study shows that main carers of children tend to take responsibility for fulfilling their partners' work-related requirements and demonstrates that they can lose their entire Universal Credit payment if their partner does not comply with mandatory requirements (see Chapter 6.6), changes to the joint claim need to be made. Liability for fulfilling work-related requirements should be decoupled in joint claims. In some cases, making separate Universal Credit payments to both partners in couples may achieve this. However, an alternative solution is needed in cases of couples wherein currently one partner earns a wage from paid employment and the other receives the Universal Credit payment as in such a case, separating the payment would give the employed partner a larger share of the household income.

More broadly, the study questions the appropriateness of subjecting mothers to conditionality. Problems highlighted in this study that have been documented elsewhere include the inefficacy of sanction-backed conditionality and the adverse impacts caused by the potential for receiving a sanction (Wright, Fletcher and Stewart, 2020; Wright and Patrick, 2019; Dwyer, 2018a). While none of the participants in this study received a sanction, the possibility of this occurring raises

considerable ethical questions regarding subjecting mothers to conditionality due to the negative impacts on children should a sanction be applied (Dwyer, 2018a; Work and Pensions Committee, 2018a). Moreover, as discussed above, this study shows the highly problematic gendered implications of this policy and particularly the issues with making mothers' access to social rights dependent on paid work-related behaviour as this inherently devalues unpaid care and denies mothers agency. While the above policy recommendations can help to mitigate some of these gendered effects, questions remain regarding whether conditionality policies can ever be sufficiently adapted to satisfactorily promote a gender inclusive concept of citizenship.

Additional wider government action is required to help create the gender inclusive citizenship framework described in Section 8.3 above. Policies which would help achieve this entail providing sufficiently generous cash allowances to secure the ability to carry out unpaid care, increasing the availability and affordability of high quality formal childcare provision and setting wages at levels that provide economic security and more parity of recognition (Cantillon and Lynch, 2017; Pascall, 2012; Lewis and Giullari, 2005; Lister, 2003; Cass, 1994). Other measures include regulating paid work hours, increasing opportunities for flexible work, granting the right to part-time work, improving the conditions and financial rewards of part-time work and increasing rights to paid maternity, paternity and parental leave (Cantillon and Lynch, 2017; Pascall, 2012; Sevenhuijsen, 2000; Cass, 1994). Providing women with opportunities for undertaking substantial adult education and training is also important to a gender inclusive concept of citizenship given the positive effects of these on women's employment entry and long-term earnings (Dorsett, Lui and Weale, 2011). While some of these recommendations contain limitations and are not without hazards (see Chapter 2.2), and wider societal changes in gendered cultures and practices are also required, they recognise the value of unpaid care and paid work, the diversity of women and the life course, and would help women to make genuine choices regarding engagement in unpaid care and paid work (Lewis and Giullari, 2005).

The emergence of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 has magnified the significance of the gendered impacts of the conditionality within Universal Credit and added

urgency to implementing the above policy recommendations. Despite record high levels of employment at the time of the fieldwork, the participants faced difficulties in obtaining, sustaining and progressing in paid work. Therefore, it is highly likely that such difficulties will be exacerbated by the negative impacts the coronavirus has had on the paid labour market. Of particular concern, women are more highly concentrated in sectors of the economy such as retail and hospitality which have been particularly affected by the pandemic (Harding, 2020). Therefore, providing meaningful employment-related support to mothers is imperative. Additionally, it is critical at this juncture of high unemployment and a changing labour market that there is consideration of the gendered realities of low-paid work and how these can be addressed so that going forward, women have a more advantageous position in the UK paid labour market.

The ongoing pandemic and subsequent weaker paid labour market also call into question the ethicality and effectiveness of conditionality and sanctions. While conditionality was suspended during the initial months of the coronavirus pandemic, it was reintroduced in July 2020. Subjecting claimants to conditionality and sanctions given the current lack of available jobs is unfair and could be counterproductive (Economic Affairs Committee, 2020). The current difficulties claimants are facing in obtaining paid work that are completely outside of their control further problematise the emphasis within conditionality policies on the supply side rather than the demand side in efforts to increase moves off benefits and into paid work (see Chapter 2.3).

The pandemic has also highlighted women's disproportionate responsibility for care and has increased it due to the reductions in the availability of formal childcare provision (Harding, 2020). At the same time, the necessity of unpaid care has been made more evident. This magnifies problems with the mandatory expectation within Universal Credit for women to undertake extensive work-related requirements and paid work while failing to address, and at times exacerbating, women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care. It therefore brings to the fore the need for recognition within Universal Credit policy and practice of what is entailed in caring for children, the difficulties in fully commodifying unpaid care and how unpaid care can make engagement in work-related requirements and paid work difficult.

Additionally, there is increased impetus for recognising unpaid care as a valid and essential societal contribution in part through providing mothers with access to unconditional and sufficient social security payments.

8.5 Contribution of the study, limitations and areas for future research

This study makes an original contribution to the academic literature and research by providing analysis of new empirical evidence which demonstrates the gendered impacts of the conditionality within Universal Credit. Through tracking mothers' experiences and views across time, this study has shown in detail how this welfare reform affects mothers' lives, for example by reducing the quality of care mothers are able to provide, hindering the realisation of long-term career aspirations, and limiting choices regarding work-care balance. Therefore, this study shows how gender concerns levelled at the Universal Credit conditionality regime for main carers of children specifically (for example, Millar, 2019; Cain, 2016; MacLeavy, 2011) and raised in the wider conditionality literature (for example, Grabham and Smith, 2010; Conaghan, 2009; MacLeavy, 2007) are realised in the lives of mothers subject to the conditionality within Universal Credit. Additionally, it provides nuance to the gender concerns raised, for example by showing the more positive experiences of mothers who have an easement. Through obtaining a sample that was diverse in terms of class, the study allowed comparison between mothers with different levels of social and cultural capital to be made. The study also shows the important yet constrained impact work coaches have on the way, and extent to which, women are impacted by conditionality thereby adding to the literature on conditionality and frontline worker discretion (Caswell et al., 2017; Nothdurfter, 2016; Fletcher, 2011).

More broadly, this study adds to the body of literature on conditionality and social citizenship (for example, Dwyer, 2016; Paz-Fuchs, 2008; King, 1999) by examining this relationship from a gender perspective. This study therefore makes an important theoretical and practical contribution by showing the ways in which making social rights conditional on paid work-related behaviour and adopting a 'work-first' approach while failing to provide adequate employment-related support specifically affects the citizenship status of women. In doing so, it highlights the gendered deficiencies of dominant citizenship frameworks by demonstrating that conceptualising citizenship

responsibilities based on masculine patterns of paid work presents difficulties for low-income women who face considerable challenges in engaging in paid work and also devalues unpaid care. This thesis therefore also strengthens the argument that women's citizenship status will remain precarious unless citizenship frameworks are reconceptualised to be more inclusive of women (Pateman, 1989) and provides suggestions for achieving this.

This study also contributes to the body of literature that challenges the justifications for, and assumptions underpinning, conditionality (for example, Patrick, 2017; Grover, 2012; Dwyer and Ellison, 2009b; Goodin, 2001). It shows that within Universal Credit practice, claimants do not receive adequate employment-related support and therefore the government is expecting more of claimants while at the same time failing to deliver on its responsibilities to them (see Chapter 6.5) thereby undermining the contractualist justification for conditionality. The study also highlights problems with describing the Claimant Commitment as a 'contract' between the government and claimants as these were routinely accepted under duress (see Chapter 7.3). Additionally, the analysis demonstrates issues with the paternalist justification by showing that paid work is not universally in claimants' best interests as they do not always get the rewards of paid work and can be negatively impacted by engagement in paid work (see Chapters 5.4, 5.5 and 6.7). The findings demonstrate that the government imposes values on claimants who do not share them (cf. Mead, 1997c) and indicates that paternalistic treatment of claimants works against aims to increase independence (see Chapters 5.5 and 7.4). The research also questions government and media depictions of 'welfare dependency' by showing that claimants do want to enter paid work (see Chapter 6.2). It also shows that rather than being irresponsible citizens, low-income mothers have extensive responsibilities for unpaid care and that they work very hard to fulfil these responsibilities (see Chapter 5). The study further problematises assumptions of the primacy of paid work by showing these fail to recognise the positives aspects of unpaid care as highlighted by the participants (see Chapter 5.5). Lastly, the study calls into question the extent to which policy can bring about behaviour change in respect of genuine attempts to obtain paid work as at times only non-productive or apparent compliance was triggered (see Chapter 7.6).

Methodologically, the research demonstrates the importance of foregrounding participants' views and experiences when conducting research that investigates the impacts of welfare reform. For example, the research revealed key areas of mismatch between the claimants' lives and government policy such as the disparity in priorities concerning unpaid care and paid work (see Chapter 5.5) and therefore results in insight as to why Universal Credit policy may be ineffective in achieving its aims. The negative and unintended outcomes of aspects of the Universal Credit regime such as the difficulties the process for claiming formal childcare costs pose in obtaining and sustaining paid work as highlighted by this study also show the importance of conducting qualitative research when investigating new policies (Rist, 2000). Additionally, the strength of obtaining participants' accounts is evident through the policy recommendations outlined in the above section as these were mainly devised by the study's participants. Obtaining such expertise from those with lived experience of welfare reform is crucial to both academics and policy makers and this practice needs to be more widely adopted so that current social security policy is more congruent to the lives of claimants and results in fewer negative outcomes (Patrick, 2017).

The use of a longitudinal approach was of critical importance in enabling the empirical, theoretical and practical contributions of the study to be made. This approach was particularly useful in investigating the impacts of the conditionality within Universal Credit on the employment trajectories of the participants. In addition to showing the difficulties the participants had in obtaining adequately-paid, secure paid work and increasing earnings over time, the study has also shown that prolonged job search can be challenging and counterproductive. The longitudinal approach was also useful for investigating the impacts of the conditionality on the mothers' caring responsibilities over time as it demonstrated the ongoing negative impacts and how entrance into paid work exacerbated these. Additionally, the longitudinal research showed that the compulsion within Universal Credit increased over time but was not accompanied by an increase in employment-related support, and indicated that resistance to compulsion was difficult to maintain. The use of QLR methods was also useful for observing the salience of the Theory of Change underpinning Universal Credit (see Chapter 3.2.2). The study found there was a striking lack of change in views relating to unpaid care, paid work and the

conditionality regime (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7) which suggests that such views are deeply held and are not easily changed by policy levers. Consequently, this study further demonstrates the usefulness of employing QLR when investigating social security policy (Millar, 2020; Patrick, 2017; Corden and Millar, 2007; Lewis, 2007) and conditionality in particular (Dwyer and Patrick, 2020).

While the research benefited from a qualitative longitudinal approach, the timescale of the PhD placed restrictions on the number of waves of interviews that could be conducted and the overall duration of the research. This particularly limited the extent to which the mothers' employment trajectories could be followed, for example in terms of the participants' long term earnings, whether the MIF was eventually reached on a consistent basis and whether there was maintenance of paid work over a longer time period. Also, it is very possible that the mothers' views and experiences will change as their circumstances change. For example, women's interactions with unpaid care and paid work often change over the life course (see Chapter 2.2.2) and also the Universal Credit conditionality regime changes with the age of the youngest child (see Chapter 3.3.2). Therefore the research was limited in that it only captured to some extent such changes and how they influenced interactions with the Universal Credit system, paid work and unpaid care. The constraints of the PhD along with the employment of QLR also placed restrictions on the sample size. Similarly to the timescale of the research, the sample size particularly limited the extent of the findings in regard to the efficacy of conditionality as the study only obtained the job entry and progression outcomes for a small number of mothers. However, the findings were consistent with those from other studies (for example, Dwyer, 2018b; Reeves, 2017; Goodwin, 2008) and also, crucially to the exploration of the efficacy of conditionality, the study captured in depth the participants' perceptions of whether this policy moved them to closer to paid work and their views on its implications for their long-term employment prospects. The small sample size also limited the extent to which differences in experiences and views according to claimant characteristics (such as the ethnicity and age of the mother) could be interrogated. The attrition of four of the participants also constitutes a limitation of the study especially as these participants were experiencing some of the most challenging circumstances and this may have influenced how they experienced the conditionality regime within Universal Credit

over time. Additionally, perhaps owing to the sampling strategy and the study location, the study obtained a low number of accounts of people who are seldom heard. Likewise, the study did not capture in breadth the experiences of mothers who were subject to the most extensive work-related requirements within the Universal Credit conditionality regime for lead carers and there was a limited number of mothers with experience of a joint claim.

Future research would gain from a more prolonged timeframe as this would provide increased insight into the impacts of the conditionality within Universal Credit, for example by showing whether the mothers furthest from the paid labour market obtain jobs given more time, whether those in paid work sustain them on a long-term basis and whether self-employed mothers are able to reach the MIF on a consistent basis. A longer time frame would also be useful for investigating how changes in circumstances affect mothers' experiences of, and views on, the new conditionality regime. Future research would also benefit from a larger sample and also a sample that includes in greater quantities mothers who are seldom heard, mothers who are expected engage in (or look for) thirty-five hours of paid work a week and mothers with experience of a joint claim. Further insights into the conditionality within Universal Credit could also be obtained by interviewing children of main carers to explore how they are impacted by the new conditionality regime. Similarly, capturing the experiences and perspectives of work coaches may add to an understanding of how this policy is implemented, particularly given the role work coaches play in salient aspects of the Universal Credit claim such as setting and monitoring work-related requirements.

8.6 Conclusion

This thesis has found that the conditionality regime for main carers of children within Universal Credit contributes towards a problematic shift in the citizenship status of low-income mothers. Rather than help create a citizenship framework that is more inclusive of women, the conditionality furthers an androcentric concept of citizenship and thereby exacerbates women's disadvantaged citizenship status. By making social rights dependent on paid work-related behaviour, conditionality demands women undertake paid work as their active citizenship contribution and increases the

devaluation of unpaid care. This is particularly problematic given that unpaid care is an essential and highly important contribution disproportionately carried out by women. However, the conditionality within Universal Credit does not recognise or address the gender inequalities mothers face in obtaining paid work caused in part by their greater responsibility for care. Therefore, the conditionality requires mothers to obtain full citizenship status on the same terms as men without counteracting the significant challenges they face in obtaining and sustaining the types of paid work that would enable them to achieve this. It also places more constraints on mothers in regard to choices around unpaid care and paid work thereby diminishing women's ability to exercise agency. The combination of these factors results in further excluding low-income mothers, weakening their social positioning and recognition, and eroding a mothering identity which they consider important. It also has negative impacts on their daily lives for example in terms of the stress and time poverty incurred.

Given the above findings, this thesis ultimately calls for social security benefits to be designed and delivered in ways that enhance, rather than undermine, low-income women's citizenship status and that do not have negative gendered impacts on their daily lives. This study shows that one crucial means of achieving this is by talking to mothers who are impacted by welfare reform. As one of the study's participants explained concerning consulting mothers during the policy formation of Universal Credit: "You'd never find something that was perfect for everyone but to actually consult I think you would have a different system." Listening to and incorporating the recommendations of mothers when devising and implementing welfare reform is one way in which policy makers can ensure recognition is given to a group of women who have been, and are increasingly, designated a lesser citizenship position. Effort to engender citizenship is essential for women in their diversity to obtain full citizenship status in their own right.

Appendix A Comparison of lone parent flexibilities in previous regulations and the provision of flexibilities in Universal Credit regulations

Regulations that have no comparable Universal Credit regulation	
Provision for flexibilities in current regulations	Provision for flexibilities in Universal Credit regulations
Single parents with a dependent child under 13 can limit the hours they work to their child's usual school hours, even if there are no reasonable prospects of finding work.	Regulation 88 (2) (b) stipulates that responsible carers with a child under 13 can restrict their work availability to their child's normal school hours. An answer to a parliamentary question ⁹¹ confirms that this group of single parents will not have to show reasonable prospects of finding work, however the regulation as drafted is unclear and could be misinterpreted. Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could attract a sanction of three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been noncompliant on previous occasions.
Single parents with a dependent child aged between 13 and 16 can limit the hours they work according to their caring responsibilities, even if there are no reasonable prospects of finding work.	Regulation 88 (2) (a) (i) (ii) stipulates that responsible carers can restrict work availability, but only if they have reasonable prospects of finding work. It does not make provision for continuing to limit availability if there are no reasonable prospects of work. Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could attract a sanction of three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been non-compliant on previous occasions.
Refusing a job offer or to follow an instruction from an adviser when there is no affordable or appropriate childcare available	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could attract a sanction of three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been noncompliant on previous occasions
Leaving a job because of a lack of available and affordable childcare	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could attract a sanction of three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been noncompliant on previous occasions

Limiting work search requirements when there is no affordable, appropriate childcare available during the school holidays	Failure to comply with a work search requirements could attract a medium or higher level sanction.
Allowing up to seven days to attend a job interview to take account of caring responsibilities	Failure to comply with a work availability requirement could attract a sanction of three months, six months or three years depending on whether the claimant has been noncompliant on previous occasions
Limiting work search requirements when a child has been excluded from school	Failure to comply with a work search requirements could attract a medium or higher level sanction.
Limiting work search requirements when a claimant is subject to a parenting order or contract	Failure to comply with a work search requirements could attract a medium or higher level sanction.

Regulations that have been limited in Universal Credit regulations	
Provision for flexibilities in current regulations	Provision for flexibilities in Universal Credit regulations
Limiting work search and work availability requirements when dealing with a death involving a close friend or family member	Regulation 99 (3) (d) only applies to the death of a claimant's partner or a claimant's child
Limiting work search and work availability requirements when dealing with a serious illness involving a close friend or family member	This may be covered in guidance relating to regulation 99 (5) (b) under temporary circumstances
Limiting work search and work availability requirements when dealing with a domestic emergency involving a close friend or family member	This is covered regulation 99 (5) (b) however timeframes are not stipulated

Regulations that are being matched in Universal Credit	
Provision for flexibilities in current regulations	Provision for flexibilities in Universal Credit regulations
A single parent can take up to one month to take up paid work and be treated as fulfilling the work availability requirement	Equivalent regulation: 96 (3) (b)

Source: The Fawcett Society, 2015

Appendix B Information leaflet

Department of Social Policy and Social Work

UNIVERSITY *of* York

Participants needed for research study on Universal Credit

Are you a mum who is receiving Universal Credit?

Are you required to prepare for work and/or job search?

Who is doing this research and what is it about?

My name is Kate Andersen and I am doing this research as part of my PhD at the University of York. As Universal Credit is a new benefit which introduces changes to the previous benefits system, I am interested in exploring how mothers view and experience the work-related requirements of their Claimant Commitment. In order to do this, I am looking to interview twice over a six month period mums (single or in a couple) who are receiving Universal Credit and are required to job-search.

What will the first interview be about?

If you decide to be interviewed, I will ask you about your views and experiences of Universal Credit, including the claiming process, meeting the job-search requirements and the effects of Universal Credit on your job prospects and your ability to look after your children. You do not have to answer every question, you can choose to end the interview at any time and you can withdraw from the research at any time.

When, where and how long will the interview be?

The interview will take place at a time and place of your choosing. The interview can take place in a range of locations including a library, a café or your own home, depending on what suits you best. The interview will last about an hour and with your permission, will be audio-recorded.

What will happen after the interview?

After the interview, I will anonymise the recording and type up what you have said. I will produce some summaries of the research, and will send one to you if you would like one. After approximately six months I will be in touch with you to arrange a second interview if you still wish to take part.

What about confidentiality?

Your personal details will remain strictly confidential. Your name and any other information that could identify you will not be used in any published reports, and I will not pass your details on to anybody else. Taking part in these interviews and anything you say in them will not affect any of the benefits or services you receive. If, during the interviews, I think that you or someone else might be at risk of harm, I may have to contact the relevant authorities, but would discuss this with you first. The anonymised interviews will be stored securely at the University of York and, if you agree, archived with the UK Data Service for future researchers to use.

Will I get paid?

As a thank you for taking part you will receive a £20 Love2shop voucher for each interview.

How can I take part?

If you would like to take part in the research or ask any questions, then please contact me, Kate Andersen, via email (ka819@york.ac.uk) or phone (**07874 074905**). This research is being supervised by Professor Peter Dwyer—please email him (peter.dwyer@york.ac.uk) if you would like to check I'm genuine.

If you have any concerns or complaints please contact the Head of the Ethics Committee, Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York on spsw-ethics@york.ac.uk or on 01904 321480.

21.06.2018

Appendix C Wave one interview guide

1. Introduction:

Many thanks for agreeing to take part in this research. My name is Kate and I am doing this research as part of my PhD at the University of York. As Universal Credit is a new benefit, I am interested in how mothers experience and view the work-related requirements of their Claimant Commitment.

The interview will last about an hour and, with your permission, will be recorded. Any information you provide will be kept confidential unless you reveal risk of harm to a vulnerable person in which case I would have to report it to [name of relevant gatekeeper]. I may use what you have said in my dissertation and other publications but will change your name.

Have you read the information leaflet? Do you have any questions about the study?

Ask interviewee to read and sign consent form.

2. Personal/background details

- a. Tell me a bit about yourself. *Prompts:*
 - i. *How many children to you have? How old are they?*
 - ii. *Do you have any childcare? What kind? Do you get any help from friends and family? If so: who, how often?*
 - iii. *Are you in a relationship at the moment?*
 - iv. *Have there been any big changes in your life recently?*
 - v. *What are you doing at the moment? Childcare/paid work/training/voluntary work? What kind of paid work/training? How many hours a week?*

3. Experiences of claiming Universal Credit. I understand you are claiming Universal Credit. Can you tell me about your experience of claiming Universal Credit?

- a. Claiming process. Let's start with the claiming process. How was that for you? *Prompts: When made claim? Why made claim? How was making a claim with your partner/husband? Were you asked to nominate a 'responsible/lead carer'? How easy was it to decide who the 'responsible/lead carer' would be?*
- b. Claimant Commitment. Usually when you claim Universal Credit, you sign a Claimant Commitment. Did you? *Prompts:*
 - i. *What are the conditions of your claim (including frequency of Jobcentre interviews, types/duration of work preparation activities, number of hours expected to job search, means of job searching, distance expected to travel)?*
 - ii. *To what extent was your responsibility for taking care of your children taken into account (do your work-related requirements fit within preschool/school hours/term times? Was there understanding that caring responsibilities may make it difficult to carry out tasks?),*

iii. *To what extent were the conditions negotiated between you and your advisor (in regard to number of job-search hours/amount of work preparation, paid work availability, specified actions for obtaining paid work, type of work, location of work)? [Did mothers know about easements?]*

- c. Meeting conditions. How easy do you find it to carry out the tasks of your Claimant Commitment (both as an individual and as a couple if relevant)? *Prompts: Attending Jobcentre interviews, undertaking required work preparation/training/job searching (using Find A Job), searching for required number of hours)?*
- d. Support.
- i. Is there anything that makes it difficult for you to undertake paid work? *Prompts: Childcare, age, lack of jobs in the area, skills/qualifications, lack of work experience, lack of confidence, transport difficulties? [ask to explain these]*
 - ii. How understanding of these difficulties has your work coach been?
 - iii. What kind of support and advice has your work coach been offering to help you into work? *Prompts: Helping with: training (if so, what and how useful; made to do any training course?), work experience, searching for work, meeting childcare needs?*
 - iv. Does your work coach direct you to apply to particular jobs? *If so, what jobs? How much choice is there in the types of jobs you apply for?*
 - v. Are you using the additional help with childcare provided under Universal Credit?
- e. Sanctions. Have you (or your partner/husband) ever been threatened with a sanction/referred for a sanction/been sanctioned? *Prompts: Reasons for this? Were caring responsibilities taken into consideration? Duration of sanction? What happened as a result of you being sanctioned? What is it like having the possibility of being sanctioned?*

4. The effects of the conditionality within Universal Credit

- a. Effects on agency
- i. What are your personal preferences regarding care and work? *Prompts: Would you like to start working? When? What kind of work? Why? How many hours a week? Would you like to undertake any training? If you need childcare, what type of childcare would you like to use?*
 - ii. How does Universal Credit fit with these? *Prompts: How do you feel about the Universal Credit conditions? Were you looking for work before you started claiming Universal Credit? If so, how? (If they do not fit, explore how participants respond to this).*
 - iii. What are your hopes/plans for work for the next few months?
- b. Effects on employment.
- i. Do you think that the job-search requirements of Universal Credit will bring you closer to work? *Prompts: If so, how? What kind of work? When? Long-term/Short-term? If not, why not? What could be done to help move you closer to work? [Try to find out if conditionality has or not]*

- c. Effects on caring roles and responsibilities. How do your work-related requirements affect your ability to care for your children? *Prompts: Are there ways in which it helps you as a parent? Ways in which it makes being a parent harder? How manage carrying out the required job preparation/search conditions at the same time as carrying out your caring responsibilities (and undertaking paid work too if relevant)?*

5. Views on the conditionality within Universal Credit

- a. Is it fair that women caring for their children should be required to look for, and take up, paid work? *Prompts: From what age of youngest child? For how many hours a week? Time of day/year? What job preparation/search requirements are appropriate?*
- b. How much choice do you think that you as a [partnered] mother should have as to when you start work and how much work you do?
- c. Do you think that mothers caring roles and the unpaid child care they carry out are valued in the UC system? *Why/why not?*
- d. i. Do you think it is appropriate for one parent to be labelled the 'responsible/lead carer'? [Do they even know of this designation?]
 ii. How do you feel about having the most responsibility for looking after your children/the amount of responsibility you have for looking after your children?
 iii. If in a couple: What do you think about the fact that one parent is subject to full-time job-search and the other to part-time job-search requirements (for those with a child under 13)?
- e. Is it fair to sanction mothers who don't meet their Claimant Commitment conditions? *Why? Prompts: Jobs available? Adequate flexibility for mothers? Effects on family as a whole? Sufficient support from Jobcentre in return? If yes: Under what circumstances? How much/long should sanction be?*
- f. Is it fair for a couple to be sanctioned when only one person in it committed an offence? *Why?*

6. Summary

- a. How do you think Universal Credit could be improved for you as a mother?
- b. What is the main message you want me to take away?

Conduct biographical questionnaire (below).

Thank interviewee for her help and give shopping voucher.

Offer to send summary of research findings.

Discuss second interview and re-iterate that participation in this is voluntary.

Biographical Questionnaire

1. Age at time of interview _____

2. Location

Rural Urban

3. Ethnicity: Ask interviewee to self define:

White

- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
 Irish Gypsy or Irish Traveller Other White background, please describe:

Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups

- White and Black Caribbean White and Black African White and Asian
 Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe:

Asian / Asian British

- Indian Pakistani Bangladeshi Chinese
 Any other Asian background, please describe:

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

- African Caribbean
 Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe:

Other ethnic group

- Arab Any other ethnic group, please describe:

4. Nationality: How would you describe your national identity?

English Welsh Scottish Northern Irish British

Other, please describe:

5. Main current employment status:

You

Your partner

Employed full-time (average total = 25 hours or more)

Employed part-time (average total = 16-24 hours)

Employed short-hours (average total = 1-15 hours)

Employed variable hours

Not in paid work

Self employed

Voluntary work

6. Benefits: Are you receiving any benefits other than Universal Credit?

Yes No

If yes, please detail:

7. Highest level of education

None

Secondary level

College

University

Other, please describe:

Appendix D Wave two interview guide

1. Introduction:

Many thanks for agreeing to do a second interview. This research is part of my PhD at the University of York. As Universal Credit is a new benefit, I am interested in how mums are affected by the work-related requirements of their Claimant Commitment and am doing these second interviews to ask how you have experienced and viewed Universal Credit since the last interview.

As before, the interview will last about an hour and, with your permission, will be recorded. Any information you provide will be kept confidential unless you reveal risk of harm to a vulnerable person in which case I would have to report it to [name of relevant gatekeeper]. I may use what you have said in my dissertation and other publications but will change your name. You do not have to answer every question and can choose to end the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions about this interview?

Ask interviewee to read and sign consent form.

1. Changes since the last interview

Give a brief summary of the participant's situation (eg work status, age of children, duration of Universal Credit claim, work-related requirements) at the time of the previous interview before asking the following questions.

- a. Have there been any big changes in your life since we last met?
- b. How old are your children now?
- c. Are you still receiving Universal Credit?
- d. Have your work-related requirements changed (if changed, what to inc job-search hours, distance, type of work? Why? Were the changes negotiated? Were caring responsibilities taken into account? How do they fit with work-care preferences?). If now making a joint claim: ask about experiences of being subject to conditionality as a couple and views on sanctions in couples.
- e. Have you received a sanction? If yes, were caring responsibilities taken into account? Have you been threatened with one? If not sanctioned, why?
- f. Has had literature about sanctions?
- g. Explore whether feelings regarding the possibility of sanction have changed.

2. Employment

- a. Ask about current employment status (including hours, type of job, whether doing any training/voluntary work/helping family or friends).
- b. If the participant has moved into work/increased their earnings, ask when and why they think they got the job/additional earnings (did having the work-

related requirements make a difference to getting a job and also the type of job?).

- c. If the participant is in paid work, explore how they feel about the work and whether they feel they are getting the rewards of paid work.
- d. If the participant has not moved into work/got more work: what has made it difficult to get a job/earn more?
- e. If the participant has left paid work or had a reduction in earnings ask about the reasons for this.
- f. Have there been changes in how easy/difficult it is to meet the work-related requirements? Any changes in how go about meeting commitments? If relevant: how easy is it to undertake paid work? – What are the best things and what are the worst things?
- g. Have you had the same work coach throughout your claim?
- h. What type of contact have you had with your Work Coach? How frequently are any work-related appointments?
- i. What support, advice and/or training has your work coach offered you since the last interview? Was this support optional or mandatory? Explore whether perceptions of support have changed.
- j. Explore whether there have been any changes in the relationship with the work coach (and perceived reasons for positive/negative relationships).

3. Children

- a. Have there been any changes in your childcare arrangements (formal and informal)? How have these impacted on ability to carry out paid work/work-related commitments of UC?
- b. Have there been any changes in the contact your children have with their father? How have these impacted on ability to carry out paid work/work-related commitments of UC?
- c. Are you receiving any child maintenance?
- d. Have there been any discussions with your Work Coach about your children? (eg have they at any point asked about fathers involvement/whether you have help from family? Have they asked about any additional needs children have?)
- e. Are there any ways in which your caring responsibilities have been accommodated (eg arranging appointments so they fit in school hours)?
- f. Have you been required to work/job-search throughout the school holidays? If yes, how have you managed this? Did you have childcare provision? Did your Work Coach discuss this with you?
- g. How do you feel about being a mum?.
- h. How has your paid work/work-related requirements affected your ability to care for your children? Explore whether they feel identity/role as a mum has changed and if so, how they feel about this. Ask about people whose children have additional needs – has it limited ability to support?
- i. How has your paid work/work-related requirements affected you yourself?
- j. Explore whether views on appropriateness of work-related requirements for mums in receipt of Universal Credit have changed.

4. Agency

- a. Explore whether preferences for work and care have stayed the same.
- b. What are long-term work aspirations [if don't already have this info]?
- c. Have you discussed the type of work or training you want to pursue with your Work Coach? Have you been asked to apply for any particular jobs?
- d. To what extent do you feel your choices about paid work and unpaid care have been supported? Explore how participants respond when the mandatory requirements of Universal Credit and not compatible with their choices regarding paid work and unpaid care. Explore whether participants response to compulsion has changed over time.
- e. Explore how participants feel about being told how much paid work they have to do.
- f. Explore whether compulsion has increased or decreased. Explore if feelings of pressure (or lack of) have changed – if pressure, how respond to this.
- g. Has had emails/similar reminding of sanctions?
- h. Explore whether views on sanctions have changed.

5. Summary

- a. If relevant: it sounds like you've had a positive experience of this aspect of UC – why do you think this is?
- b. At the last interview you felt ... about having the work-related requirements of Universal Credit. Have your feelings changed?
- c. Is there anything else you would like to say about Universal Credit, work and care?

Ask biographical questions (below).

Thank interviewee for her help and give shopping voucher – ask to sign form.

Offer to send summary of research findings.

Biographical Questions

1. What is your highest qualification?
2. What are your parents' occupations?
 - a. Mother.....
 - b. Father.....
3. Housing type.....

Appendix E Consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR “UNIVERSAL CREDIT: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF MOTHERS SUBJECT TO CONDITIONALITY”

Please answer the questions below by putting a tick in the box marked “yes” or “no”.

I agree to take part in the research. This means I will be interviewed.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to you recording me. (You can still take part without being recorded).	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that I do not have to take part in the research and withdrawing won't affect any of the services I receive.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been told what this research is about, who is doing it and why it's being done. I've been given an information sheet (dated 21.06.2018).	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've been able to ask questions about the research.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can refuse to answer any question and can withdraw at any time.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will not be named in any research reports, and my personal information will remain confidential.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that if the researcher thinks that I or someone else might be at risk of harm, they will have to contact the relevant authorities. But they will try and talk to me first about the best thing to do.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree for my anonymous data to be archived at the UK Data Service and for other researchers to be able to access and use it.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give consent for you to use my words in any research output.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that other researchers may use my words in research outputs only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to my contact details being kept by the researcher and to the researcher contacting me again (if necessary through) to ask if I want to participate in a second interview.	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher signature: _____

Researcher name: _____

List of abbreviations

AET	Administrative Earnings Threshold
CET	Conditionality Earnings Threshold
CSJ	Centre for Social Justice
CTC	Child Tax Credit
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
MIF	Minimum Income Floor
QLR	Qualitative Longitudinal Research
RTI	Real Time Information
SSAC	Social Security Advisory Committee
WTC	Working Tax Credit

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