

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Over 80% of single parents on Universal Credit unable to meet tougher and 'unmanageable' work requirements

- **59% of single parents are struggling to meet their original work requirements**
- **81% of single parents are unable to meet the new 30-hour work requirement**
- **98% of single parents face barriers to work including lack of affordable childcare, lack of flexible work and single parent discrimination**
- **74% of single parents do not find work coach meetings useful**

5 MARCH 2024 - Over 80% of single parents in receipt of Universal Credit are unable to meet the new 30-hour work requirements introduced last October for lead carers of 3-12-year-olds, new research from campaign group Single Parent Rights, supported by Save the Children, and Mothers Uncovered has found.

In the survey of 638 single parents, the increase was “unmanageable” for 81%, while only 32% found their work requirements manageable prior to the increase. Only 6% reported they would be able to meet the new work requirements. Single parents on low incomes, those from racialised minority groups, and sole carers were found to face even greater challenges in meeting their work requirements.

The new work requirements, introduced by the Government last October, require lead carers of 3 - 12-year-olds to be available for work for up to 30 hours a week, up from 16 hours a week for parents of 3 - 4 year olds and up from 25 hours for parents of 5 – 12-year-olds.

The research identified multiple barriers facing single parents looking for work/increased hours, and one of the biggest was childcare availability (65%) and affordability (60%). There were also concerns regarding the mental health impact on parents (60%) and their children (59%), a lack of flexible work (48%), and the prevalence of single parent discrimination within the workplace (35%). Almost half who are unemployed (45%) said they felt discriminated against for being a single parent when looking for work.

A Freedom of Information request made by Single Parent Rights revealed the DWP deemed “lead carers might be more likely to be married”. Yet Single Parent Rights estimates that 75% of the 525,000 lead carers impacted by this policy change are single parents.

And while work coach meetings are intended to support lead carers looking for work and additional hours, the research revealed that 74% of single parents did not find them useful. This rose to 80% for those who had regular work coach meetings.

One single parent survey respondent said: *“The work coach bullies me and makes my anxiety through the roof. I keep getting: ‘You signed up for this’ - I signed up for help, not to be bullied.”*

Rebecca, a single mother from Norfolk with an 11-year-old child, said:

“I’ve been looking for full time hours and it’s been really getting me down. There are so many jobs which theoretically I would be able to do but I just can’t mentally and emotionally (as well as financially) manage. It makes me feel like such a failure, such a stupid person that I can’t work all these hours.”

Single Parent Rights and Save the Children are gravely concerned that even greater conditionality is coming. The Government's plans to make in-work progression support mandatory could see an increasingly punitive social security system that increases sanctions on single parents, pushes them further away from employment, and, ultimately, lead to more children being forced into poverty.

Ruth Talbot, founder of Single Parent Rights, a campaign group fighting for equality for single parents said:

"Our research reveals just how little consideration has been given to the impact on single parents right from the initial design stages of this policy. Increasing work requirements for single parents will push many to the brink, negatively impacting both parents and their children. This isn't about single parents not wanting to work – the majority already do - it's about supporting single parents to find a manageable balance between paid work and their parenting responsibilities."

Meghan Meek O'Connor, senior policy adviser at Save the Children UK, said:

"For single parent families on Universal Credit the UK Government's new work requirements are staggeringly unmanageable. To ask someone raising children alone to work, or seek work, for 30 hours of the week while childcare services remain unaffordable and difficult to access is proving to be impossible according to Single Parent Rights' survey."

"Single-parent families are already more likely to be in poverty compared to two-parent families, so ministers must reduce the hours requirement so lone parents do not feel they are being set up to fail."

Maggie Gordon-Walker, founder of Mothers Uncovered, said:

"Hundreds of mothers I've met through my work are already suffering with this new policy, which ignores families' needs and the essential work of child-rearing. Our social security system needs to offer genuine support for single parents rather than pushing them into any work. This is not only better for the parent, but their children and the wider economy."

ENDS

Summary report and full report available [here](#).

For media enquiries and case studies, please contact Ruth Talbot on singleparentrights@gmail.com

Notes:

- The new work requirements follow on from [changes last July](#) which increased the frequency of work coach meetings for lead carers of one- and two-year-olds. Parents of one-year olds must now meet with a job coach every three months (up from every six months) while parents of two-year olds must meet with their job coach monthly (up from every three months).
- Benefit conditionality rules have been tightening for single parents since 2008. Prior to that date, single parents were not required to work until their youngest child turned 16 – though many did, –for example, in 2003, 51% of single mothers were in work. Initially single parents were expected to work when their youngest turned 12. By 2017, this had been gradually reduced to when their youngest child turned 3.
- The UK is one of the only nations to focus on in-work conditionality, a policy approach largely untested, especially in terms of the long-term outcomes. A five-year study into the impact of sanctions concluded that they were ineffective and pushed people further into poverty. Citizen's Advice have also reported failures by work



coaches to recognise the challenges of balancing caring responsibilities and work search requirements, with single parents often reporting unrealistic conditionality rules.

- In answer to a [question raised in Parliament](#) for the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on 25th October 2023, Guy Opperman stated: "Claimants earning above the Administrative Earnings Threshold in the Light Touch Group currently have access to a voluntary In Work Progression offer. This will now become mandatory in 2024." No further details have been released on these plans and there are concerns within the sector that they will lead to greater sanctions.

- [Single Parent Rights](#) is a campaign group led by single parents to promote and support the rights of single parents. It was founded by Ruth Talbot after she hand delivered a letter to Dominic Cummings during lockdown and was instrumental in [securing support bubbles](#). Ruth lives in London and is a working single mum to three young boys.

- Save the Children exists to help every child get the chance of a future they deserve. In more than 100 countries, including the UK, we make sure children stay safe, healthy and learning – finding new ways to reach children who need us most. For a century, we've stood up for children's rights and made sure their voices are heard. With children, for children, we change the future for good.