

## Mutual Learning Programme Database of National Labour Market Practices

### United Kingdom - Dedicated Personal Advisors, Pathways to Work for Lone Parents (PWLP)

*This database gathers practices in the field of employment submitted by European countries for the purposes of mutual learning. These practices have proven to be successful in the country concerned, according to its national administration. The European Commission does not have a position on the policies or measures mentioned in the database.*

<b>Source of national practice</b>	Mutual Learning Programme Peer Review (May 2010)
<b>Title of the policy or measure (Original language)</b>	Dedicated Personal Advisors, Pathways to Work for Lone Parents (PWLP)
<b>Title of the policy or measure (English)</b>	Dedicated Personal Advisors, Pathways to Work for Lone Parents (PWLP)
<b>Country</b>	United Kingdom
<b>Name of the responsible body</b>	Department of Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELFI)
<b>Geographical scope of the responsible body</b>	National
<b>Name(s) of other organisations involved (partners/sub-contractors)</b>	Department of Social Development (DSD); Voluntary and community organisations; External training providers (Gingerbread, A4E and Paragon Training).
<b>Start year of implementation</b>	2007
<b>End year of implementation</b>	2009

<p><b>EU policy relevance</b></p>	<p>In recent years, the <b>number and proportion of single-parent homes in the EU has increased</b>, accounting for one in ten households in 2010. However, <b>lone parents (mostly women) face difficulties entering and remaining in the labour market, which makes them more likely to face poverty than the rest of the population</b>. Improving the situation of lone parents is a crucial part of the European policy framework, as <b>the EU is committed to fighting social exclusion and poverty, as well as advancing the cause of gender equality</b>.</p> <p>The disadvantages faced by single parents are exacerbated by the fact that <b>childcare facilities continue to be limited, expensive or non-existent in much of the EU</b>. According to a (2013) report from the European Commission, only 10 Member States met the Barcelona objective of setting up childcare facilities for at least 33% of children younger than three by 2010. A total of 11 Member States met the target of setting up childcare facilities for at least 90% of those between three and the mandatory school age.</p> <p>Against this background, the <b>Europe 2020 Strategy</b> aims to reduce the number of people in poverty or at risk of social exclusion by 25% by 2020. As women form the majority of single parents, enabling lone parents to work also relates to the EU's gender equality framework - <b>Directive 2006/54/EC</b> provisions for non-discrimination on the grounds of gender, including in employment and occupation. This means that European women and men must have equal access to job opportunities, regardless of their family situation. Furthermore, increasing female labour participation is integral to the EU 2020 growth target of 75% employment for all 20-64 year olds.</p>
<p><b>National labour market context</b></p>	<p>Over the course of the pilot scheme (2007-2009), the <b>national labour market context worsened in Northern Ireland as a result of the effects of the (2008-2009) economic crisis</b>. Prior to the downturn, the economy's strong performance was reflected in the falling unemployment rate. Between 1992 and 2005, this dropped by 58%, standing at 4.4% of the population in July 2006. By 2010, however, this had risen to 6.3%, and the proportion of economically inactive working-age citizens in Northern Ireland was 28%.</p>
<p><b>Policy area</b></p>	<p>Active labour market policies, Labour market participation, Prevention of poverty through inclusive labour markets</p>

<p><b>Specific policy or labour market problem being addressed</b></p>	<p><b>In the context of the economic downturn</b>, the situation for lone parents in Northern Ireland became more difficult, while <b>many of the features and disadvantages facing the group remained the same</b>. A <b>lack of childcare places</b> and the <b>introduction of new eligibility criteria</b> for social welfare payments contributed to the decision to begin the Pathways to Work for Lone Parents (PWLP) scheme.</p> <p>Considering the characteristics of single parents at the time of the pilot programme, <b>women led just over 90% of single-parent households</b> in both the 2001 and 2011 censuses. Lone parents were <b>still more likely to be unemployed</b> than those in couples; in 2007, 52.4% of them were in work, as opposed to 74.8% of partnered mothers. Additionally, they <b>continued to be at high risk of poverty, particularly if did not have jobs</b>. In 2009, 56% of children from inactive single parent households in the UK faced poverty; for children of lone parents in part-time and full-time employment, the figures were 17% and 7% respectively.</p> <p>In addition, <b>childcare facilities in Northern Ireland were particularly limited</b>, with only 92.5 nursery places available for every 1000 children who were 4 or younger in 2006. In 2010, the Department of Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland predicted that, even with a full commitment of executive resources, it would take around 10 years to bring available childcare in Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK. The <b>introduction of Lone Parent Obligations in 2008 obliged single parents with children over 12 to be seeking work in order to receive benefits</b>, and the eligibility criteria subsequently (2009, 2010 and 2012) became more stringent.</p>
<p><b>Aims and objectives of the policy or measure</b></p>	<p>The PWLP scheme was the first initiative aimed specifically at single parents <b>across the fields of poverty and social exclusion</b>. It aimed to <b>facilitate the (re-)integration</b> of lone parents into the labour market (and society) through a number of <b>services and incentives</b>.</p> <p><b>Working on the assumption that a paid job is the best way to gain financial autonomy and to move out of poverty</b>, the Department of Employment and Learning Northern Ireland set up the Pathways to Work for Lone Parents (PWLP) pilot to increase the number of single parents in work. It did this by offering: <b>customised guidance and interviews (through Dedicated Personal Advisors)</b>; <b>financial incentives</b> (the Return to Work Credit, the In-Work Emergency Fund and the Job Grant); <b>professional training</b> (the Work Preparation Programme for Lone Parents); and <b>subsidies for childcare costs</b> (up to £240 weekly for two or more children).</p> <p>Through offering such services, <b>the expectation was that it would be easier for lone parents to reconcile work and family commitments, to enter work and to move away from benefit dependency</b>.</p>

<p><b>Main activities/actions underpinning the policy or measure</b></p>	<p>Under the PWLP scheme, <b>specialist, psychologically-trained Dedicated Advisors offered one-to-one support to lone parents</b>. Through asking guiding questions, they could judge the parents' needs effectively and expose the perceived / actual barriers to their participation in the workforce. Drawing on their knowledge of support schemes, the advisors recommended the most appropriate training or funding. They also maintained <b>contact with the same clients throughout the entire process</b>, establishing strong bonds of trust and understanding which contributed to the overall effectiveness of the interventions.</p> <p>Advisors <b>drew on certain tools</b> to assist them when working with lone parents, and received enhanced, regular training as part of the scheme. It was mandatory for them to carry out <b>Work Focused Interviews (WFIs)</b>, which became more frequent as parents' children got older. During these, the Advisors undertook a <b>Better-off calculation (BOC)</b> to show lone parents the financial benefits of going back to work, integrating individual benefits, wages and hours worked into the calculations. The BOC helped clients to gain a clearer sense of the financial benefits of being in work. The funds provided by the Return to Work Credit (RTWC) were important in ensuring that clients were better off in work than claiming benefits, with 76% of lone parents returning to work from the pilot offices claiming the Return to Work Credit (RTWC).</p>
<p><b>Geographical scope of policy or measure</b></p>	<p>Local</p>
<p><b>Target groups</b></p>	<p>Low-skilled people, Women</p>
<p><b>Outputs and outcomes of the policy or measure</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The pilot offices worked with 3733 lone parents over the two years the measure operated. Of these, <b>3616 individuals had a WFI with a Dedicated Personal Advisor, and 539 (15%) re-entered the labour force. This compared favourably with the average re-entry rate in non-pilot offices (1%).</b></li> <li>• In a survey conducted by KPMG (as part of the evaluation of the programme, see below), <b>89% of the lone parents said that they had appreciated having a single advisor who understood their needs</b>. As a result, they were able to be more open, did not have to repeat themselves and, generally, found the discussion more persuasive. The BOC was drawn out as a positive tool.</li> <li>• Ultimately, <b>due to the strain of the economic recession</b> on the financial and human resources of the Jobs and Benefits Offices (JBOs), the <b>Advisors were absorbed into the mainstream advisory teams of the Public Employment Services</b>.</li> </ul>

<b>Management and implementation arrangements</b>	<p>A PWLP Project Board oversaw and coordinated the activities. New staff members were not employed for the project, although the Personal Advisors received enhanced training. Around £4 million was received in funding from the Science and Skills fund and the Department of Education and Learning.</p> <p>The Advisors worked in Jobs and Benefits Offices. This was the first time they had done so in Northern Ireland, although they were already in place in the rest of the UK.</p>
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## Key challenges

- **Lack of childcare services:** research, including in the UK, has shown that the availability and affordability of childcare is a crucial factor for lone parents when deciding whether to work. During the PWLP pilot, there were major gaps in the provision of childcare facilities in Northern Ireland (see above). As mentioned, the PWLP scheme offered weekly subsidies to reduce the burden of childcare costs for participants. During the period of the pilot, it fell beyond the scope of the project to set up its own facilities, given the scale of need and the restrictions on funding. More generally, at the time of the programme, the government was developing a comprehensive childcare strategy, which aimed to deliver additional, cost-effective and flexible services with high-quality staff. After the pilot, from 2011 to 2012, £300,000 was given to childcare projects and £12 million more was ring-fenced.
- **Reconciling family and work responsibilities:** Jobs for lone parents are not always flexible enough to allow them to meet their family commitments. Of the gender-related legal enquiries received by the Equality Commission in Northern Ireland between April 2001 and 31 March 2007, 24% concerned pregnancy, maternity or work-life balance in relation to employment. The PWLP pilot offices worked with local employers to find suitable work placements for the targeted groups, acting as 'advocates' for the lone parents.
- **Strained resources during a time of economic recession:** In 2009, there was no longer funding available to sustain many of the most successful elements of the programme. Public employment services were also under pressure due to rising unemployment, to the point that they employed 130 extra advisers in 2009. The PWLP scheme could not have initially anticipated such a shift in Northern Ireland's economic climate. Successful elements of the programme (the Advisors and RTWC) were ultimately retained under different umbrellas in a more limited form.
- **Local outreach:** Geographical differences in wealth and job opportunities had a considerable influence on the success of the pilot offices. Two of the offices in better-off areas achieved higher participation levels almost across the board (e.g. in arranging work placements). There was less success in the other two areas due to extreme levels of social deprivation. It fell beyond the scope of the PWLP programme to address regional disparities. Nonetheless, the PWLP's successor, the LEMIS Community Voluntary Programme, placed greater emphasis on local outreach. By relying more heavily on the regional knowledge of

	<p>local employment services the intended effect was to maximise the opportunity for work placements (etc.) even in the most socially deprived areas.</p>
<p><b>Key conditions for success</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sufficient high-quality childcare provision:</b> key elements of the PWLP were undermined by the lack of adequate childcare facilities, which need to be established to achieve the long-term integration of lone parents into the labour market. These services must be sufficiently flexible to fit around the types of jobs that lone parents tend to enter (typically in sales or services). In addition, steps should be taken to encourage more 'family-friendly' working arrangements.</li> <li>• <b>Job opportunities and financial resources:</b> as the pilot demonstrated, strong economic performance in the region / country is important in terms of the availability of work placements for participants and the long-term sustainability of such schemes. However, there is a balance to be struck. During recession, it may be important to invest in such pilots in order to reduce long-term welfare dependency and get more citizens into the labour market, which both alleviates poverty and benefits the public purse.</li> <li>• <b>One-on-one contact with a single, specialist advisor:</b> as shown by the interviews with lone parents carried out by KPMG, it was important that lone parents were able to maintain contact with the same Advisor, allowing strong relationships to be established that were fundamental to the success of the programme. The Advisors were also highly qualified and received regular training.</li> <li>• <b>Making it more cost-effective to be in work than on benefits:</b> participants in the PWLP scheme were motivated to re-enter the job market by the knowledge that they would be better-off in employment than on benefits. This was facilitated through the use of the RTWC and demonstrated through the BOC (for supporting figures, see the 'Main activities' section above).</li> <li>• <b>Effective partnerships between statutory agencies and social partners:</b> particularly during times of recession, it is vital to work closely with other social partners in order to encourage a holistic response to social issues and to enhance the efficiency of services. In this scheme, it was also beneficial to minimise the appearance of government influence, as lone parents were more willing to visit the JBOs if they did not fear the loss of benefits.</li> </ul>

<b>Method of assessment</b>	External evaluation
<b>Type of assessment</b>	Qualitative and quantitative assessment
<b>Duration and frequency of the assessment</b>	One-off assessment
<b>Further information on the assessment</b>	<p>In undertaking the evaluation KPMG analysed administrative data and undertook interviews with staff and 100 lone parents in order to assess the performance of the PWLP pilot:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As discussed in the 'Outcomes' section above, there was fairly positive feedback from the lone parents about the role of the Dedicated Personal Advisors – which the evaluation highlighted as one of the most successful elements.</li> <li>• The Return to Work Credit was judged to be the other effective feature of the programme, as it meant that lone parents working at least 16 hours each week would receive more money than they would have through claiming Income Support (a benefit).</li> <li>• The PWLP offices directed more lone parents to training schemes than the other offices, but this did not result in a significantly higher take-up rate. The cause for this is unclear.</li> <li>• The PWLP scheme was judged to be more cost-effective than its predecessors. Overall, it cost £1,445,912, with an average of £2683 spent per new job entry. This was lower than the per-entry cost for the New Deal 25+ and the Local Employment Intermediaries Service.</li> <li>• The lack of affordable childcare restricted the effect of the PWLP pilot.</li> </ul>



<b>Links to the website, background information and assessment material</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KPMG, <i>Evaluation of Pathways to Work for Lone Parents Pilots, Final Report</i> (2009), prepared for the Department for Employment and Learning</li> <li>• Deloitte, Interim evaluation of the Employment Service Delivery Model, Steps to Work and Pathways for Lone Parents Projects: <a href="#">Final Report (2008)</a>, prepared for the Department of Employment and Learning</li> <li>• Summary of the (2010) Peer Review in Northern Ireland, as well as related documents: <a href="#">Pathways to Work for Lone Parents</a></li> <li>• The high risks of poverty and social exclusion for lone parent households were explored in depth in a comparative study of 13 European countries: European Commission, <i>Study on Poverty and Social Exclusion Among Lone-Parent Households</i> (2007). This can be found here: <a href="#">Study on poverty and social exclusion among lone parents households</a></li> <li>• European Commission, <i>Barcelona objectives: The development of childcare facilities for young children in Europe with a view to sustainable and inclusive growth</i> (2013): <a href="#">Barcelona Objectives</a></li> <li>• (Recast) Directive 2006/54/EC on gender equality: <a href="#">DIRECTIVE 2006/54/EC</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">The Equality Commission, Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland (2007)</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">General link to the Mutual Learning Programme</a></li> </ul>
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<b>Keywords</b>	<p>lone parents, single parents, child poverty, poverty, working parents, lone parent unemployment, lone parent poverty, single parent[s] employment</p>