

# Left Behind: The Impact of Welfare Changes on Single Parent Households

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## What this session will cover

1. The impact of the job-seeking requirement in Universal Credit
2. Supporting single parents post-Covid-19: key considerations
3. Gingerbread's recommendations for improving long term outcomes for single parents



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# UC and single parents

## UC and single parents

- There are more than a million single parents on UC, accounting for 63% of all single parents in the UK
- Previous Gingerbread forecasts have estimated that 90% of single parents will be on UC once the full roll out is complete
- However, the wider economic effects of COVID-19 means single parents currently make up a lower proportion of UC claimants than pre-pandemic
- Single parent households are still disproportionately affected by the Benefit Cap, and this has increased during the pandemic



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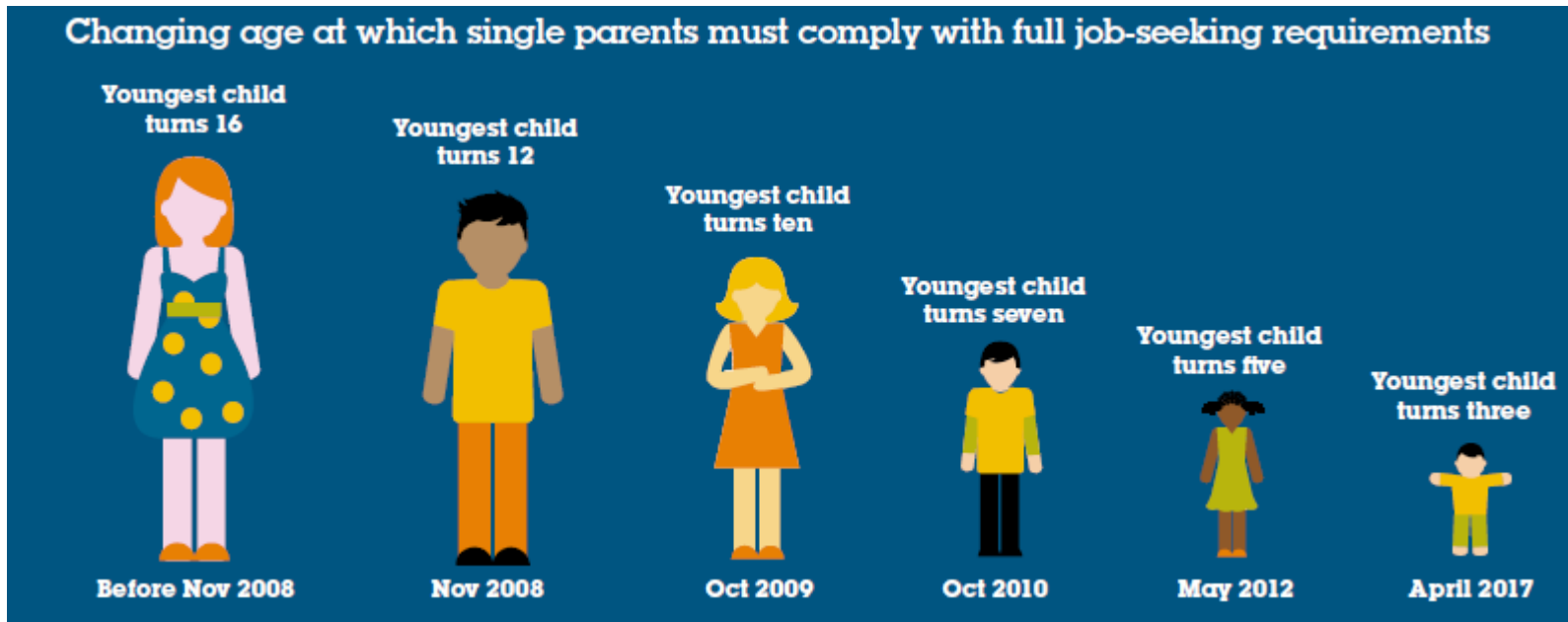


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# Expanding the job seeking requirement for single parents

# Impact of job seeking requirements

- The rules around job seeking requirements have changed markedly over the last 13 years
- Prior to November 2008, the threshold was when youngest child turned 16
- Since 2017, the obligation has been for parents to look for work once their youngest child reaches 3 years old



**Table 1: Employment rates for single and couple parents in UK and London, by age of youngest child, 2019**

	UK		LONDON	
	Youngest child 3–4 years old	All	Youngest child 3–4 years old	All
Single parents	58%	69%	50%	74%
Couple parents	85%	85%	88%	87%

Source: Gingerbread (2020) Left Behind: Single parents with pre-school aged children and job-seeking under Universal Credit in London: <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/policy-campaigns/publications-index/left-behind/>

# Barriers to meeting work requirements

- **Difficulty finding suitable work** – hard to find roles which fit around childcare responsibilities
- **Childcare** – lack of availability and meeting upfront costs
- **Risk of debt from working more hours**
- **Inconsistent support from work coaches** – lack of information when transferring to UC, lack of recognition around pressures on single parents
- **Limited access to technology** – makes it harder for many single parents to apply for jobs
- **Flexibilities** – especially to be able to undertake training and skills development
- **Impact of COVID-19**



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**“They said I wasn’t doing enough to do the job search...The hours [available] are not suitable for someone in my predicament.”**

**“We just want the 10-2 jobs and that’s hard: they are the popular jobs”**

**“The job coach does not offer any official advice for me because I am a single parent. They treat me like any other claimant.”**

**“Now they always say you have got to go online and if you find a job you have to apply online. We don’t have a computer (at home)”**

**“I could not find that money to keep paying childcare and then waiting a whole month to receive it back. It was £800, it was ridiculous and that was most of my salary, so it did not make sense”.**

**“I am trying to do my best as a single parent but I do not feel supported by the jobcentre”**

**“I’ve told them I would like to go to school to improve my English, then they say ‘You have to get a job’.”**



# Supporting single parents through COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

# The impact of the pandemic

- **The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities**
- Single parents are **more likely to have lost their jobs** and those who remained in work saw the biggest decline in hours
- Single parents are **more likely to say they are finding it difficult to manage their finances** and that they are behind with their bills
- **49% of single parents reported taking on more debt as a result of the pandemic**
- **UC is a driver of debt for some single parents:** 57% of single parents in problem debt found that UC makes it harder for them to budget
- The £20 uplift to Universal Credit has been a lifeline for many, but there has been a **marked increase in the numbers of single parents affected by the Benefit Cap**



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# Recommendations for improving long term outcomes

## Key recommendations

1. **Provide high-quality employment and skills support for single parents**, including specialist single parent work coaches or referral to specialist providers
2. **Support provision of high-quality flexible and part-time jobs**, making the Employment Bill a priority, and including the provision requiring jobs to be advertised as flexible by default
3. **Improve childcare support** and changing Universal Credit rules so that parents do not have to meet childcare costs in advance
4. **Ensure our social security system provides sufficient and effective support both for single parents who are out of work and those in employment**, including retaining the £20 increase to Universal Credit, extending it to legacy benefits, scrapping the five-week wait, and increasing the level of the Benefit Cap



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Thank you

Any questions?