



Making the grade: top findings supporting single parents to skill up benefits us all

We know it can be tough getting back into work when you are a single parent. Often, it is not as simple as taking the first job that comes along; the key to making work pay is finding a job at the right number of hours and at a decent wage.

This is made all the more difficult if you don't have the right qualifications. Single parents as a group tend to have lower qualification levels. This means it is harder to find work that pays enough to make ends meet. Better paid work is out of reach for many single parents because the jobs that attract higher salaries require intermediate level qualifications; qualifications equivalent to A-levels.

There are 1.3 million single parents in this situation. But it doesn't have to be this way. If single parents were given an opportunity to skill up before getting a job, it could make a big difference to their working lives and family income.

Our new research has found that single parents with intermediate qualifications can:

- Earn more money, a difference of £1,500 a year on average if working 30 hours a week
- Compete better for jobs
- Spend less time out-of-work
- Have improved job security.

This means single parents can earn more of their own money, be less reliant on benefits and be a positive role model for their children. We know that single parents are motivated and want to work, but support from the jobcentre for single parents wanting to improve their qualification levels does not match their level of aspiration.

All too often single parents who are looking for work are not allowed to take further education courses, or are told they must give up a course they've already started in order to take a job. Help to pay for a level 3 course is no longer available; single parents over the age of 24 are expected to take out a loan to pay for course fees. The prospect of getting into debit to pay for a course will be a barrier to some single parents, meaning they risk getting stuck in low paid jobs without a chance to progress and increase their earnings.

But supporting single parents to skill up brings wider benefits. It contributes to a more productive workforce and a growing economy, increases the amount of money the government can collect in taxes and reduces the amount of money it pays out in benefits. In fact, the government could gain up to £670 million over seven years if it invests in training single parents.

We're calling on the government to increase upfront investment so that single parents can get their first level 3 qualification without taking out a loan or getting into debt; guarantee to fund childcare costs whilst studying and ensure that single parents can finish a course before finding a job.

The government – as well as single parents – is losing out under the current system. By offering financial support to all single parents with a highest qualification at level 2 to gain a level 3 qualification; over a seven year period, the Exchequer could potentially gain up to:

£670 million

when supporting unemployed single parents⁸⁸ to complete a one year level 3 course and they move into work of 20 hours a week on an average level 3 salary

or

£350 million

when supporting unemployed single parents to complete a two-year level 3 course and they move into work of 20 hours a week on an average level 3 salary

The financial gains to single parents from skilling up are considerable. These illustrative examples show how single parents could increase their earning power by attaining further qualifications.

Hannah from Merthyr Tydfil earns

over twice as much as a level 3 qualified nurse than she would in a job with an average level 2 wage in Wales;

£16.94 per hour
compared with **£7.22** per hour

Georgia from Manchester earns

£12.32 an hour after gaining her level 3 bookkeeping qualification, as opposed to

£7.97 on an average level 2 wage

Ian from Brent earns

£19 an hour

after qualifying as a speech and language therapist, compared with

£9 an hour on an average level 2 wage in Brent

Jackie from Birmingham gains a

level 3 qualification in marketing and sales, and her earnings increase by

£23 per hour