



Welfare Rights Conference 2024

Sanctions and conditionality

David Webster

Honorary Senior Research Fellow,
University of Glasgow Urban Studies

Angela Toal

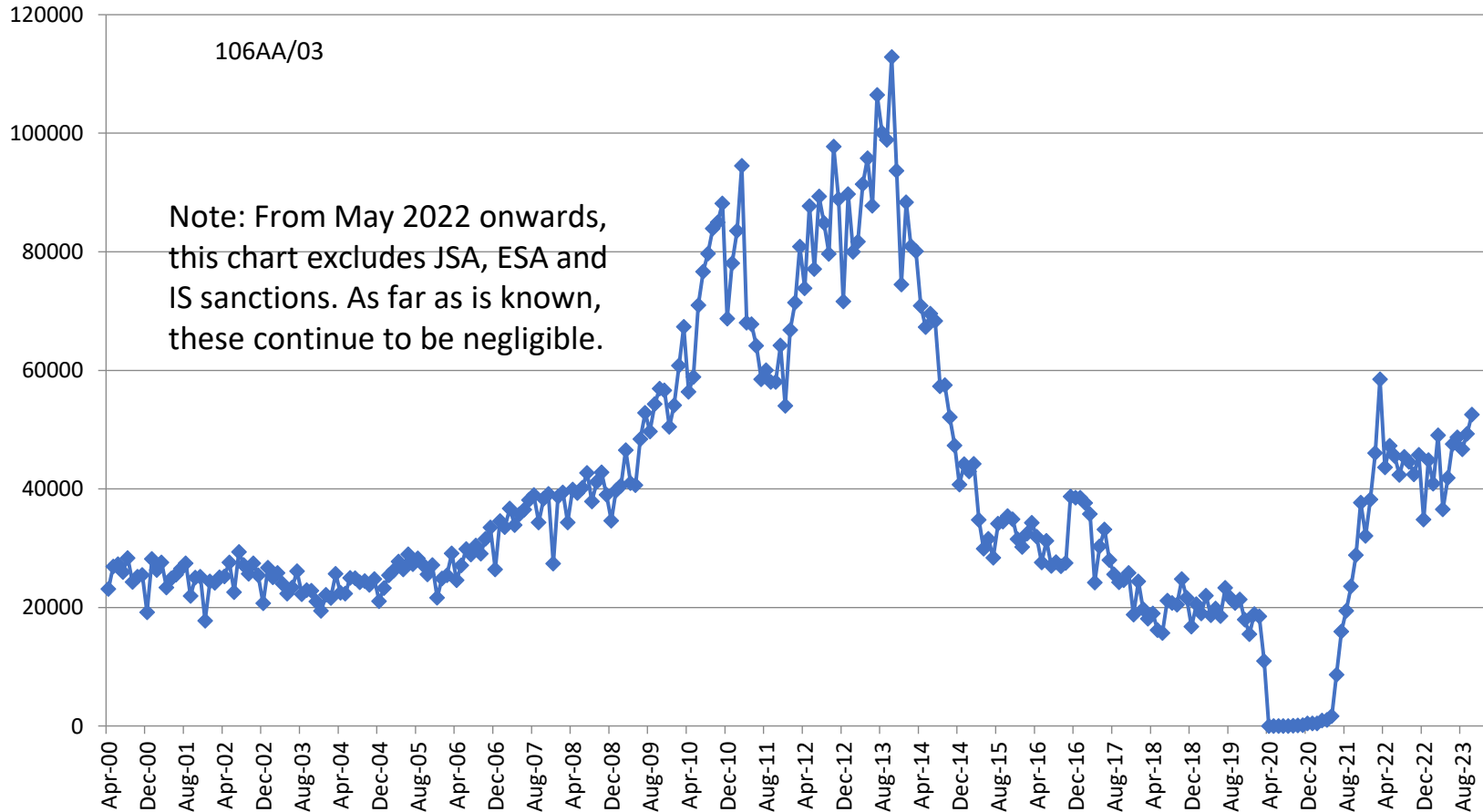
Welfare Rights Adviser, CPAG in Scotland



The overall picture

- No. of sanctions has increased since Covid moratorium ended (April 2021); now approx. 50,000 per month
- Now higher than before the pandemic, but much lower than during the 2010-2015 Coalition sanctions drive
- In the last two years numbers of sanctions have been approximately stable but conditions have been made much more onerous for claimants
- Remember that the post-2012 regime is harsher than before, e.g. increased job search, 'hardship payments' repayable, sanctions consecutive not concurrent

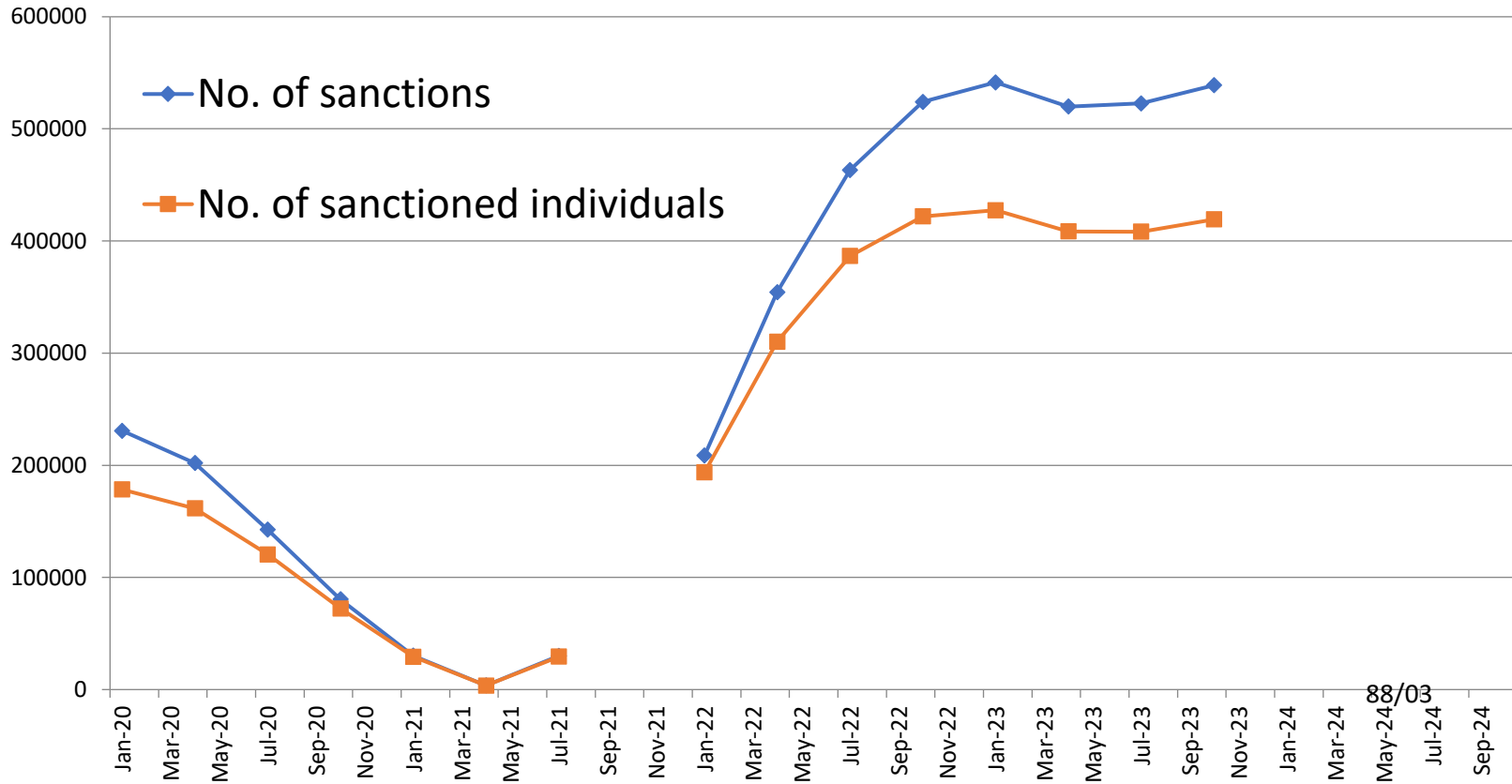
Monthly total sanctions, all benefits, since 2000



Trends in sanctions

- Repeat sanctions are common
- In the latest 12 months, there were 538,842 UC sanctions and 419,219 sanctioned claimants
- 21.6% of sanctioned claimants received more than one sanction, and 5.2% more than two

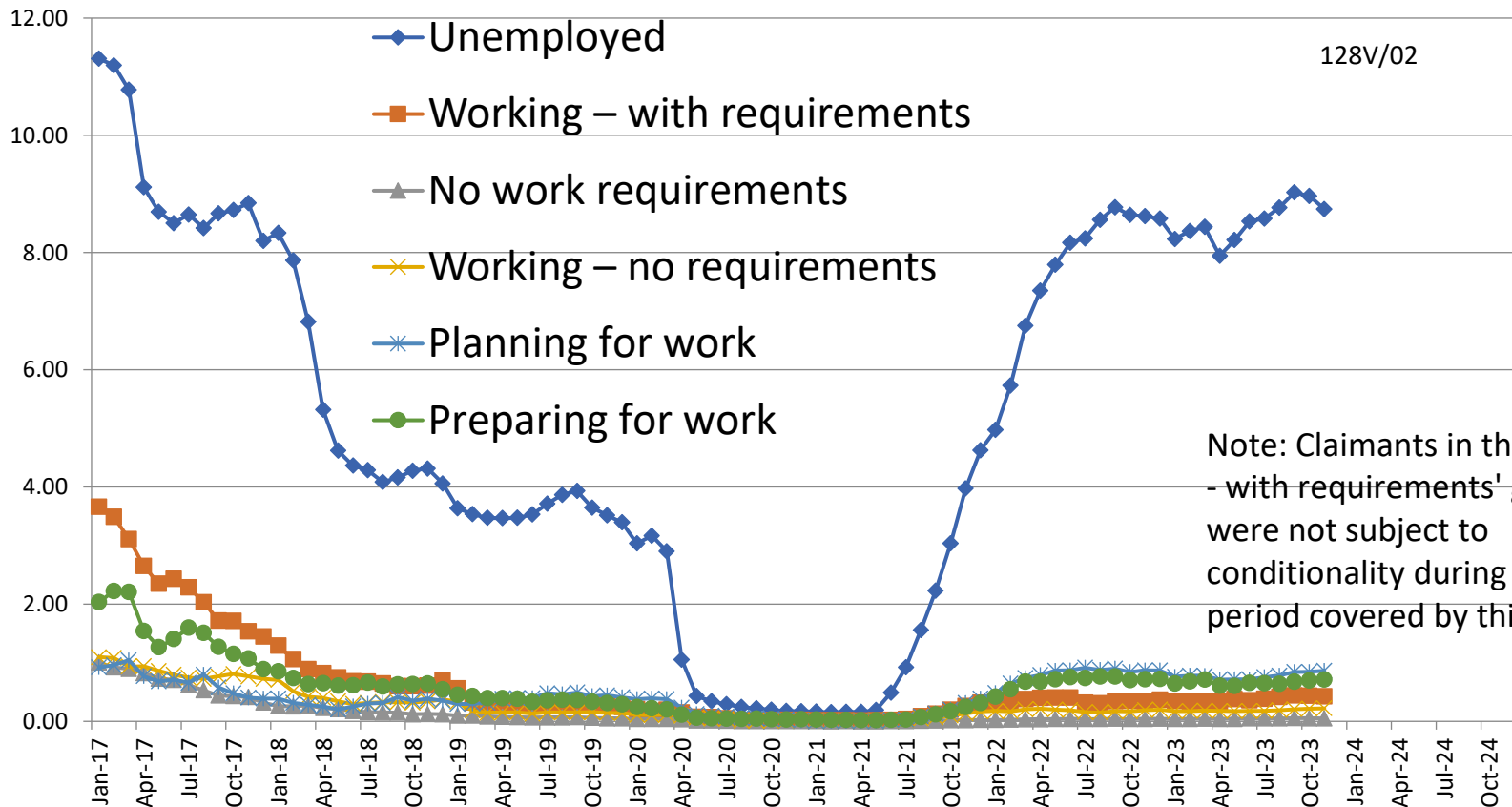
UC: No. of sanctions and of sanctioned individuals for the 12-month periods ending in month shown



Serving a sanction at a point in time

- The impact of sanctions is best measured by their number, because effects can be long lasting, e.g. creating debt, eviction, relationship breakdown
- But DWP prefers to measure the number of claimants serving a sanction at a point in time – apparently because it produces a relatively small number
- Latest figure is 136,000 – up from 35,100 before pandemic
- 123,500 (90.8%) of these were unemployed ('searching for work') – sanctions are much lower on other groups

UC: Percentage of claimants under sanction at a point in time, by conditionality group

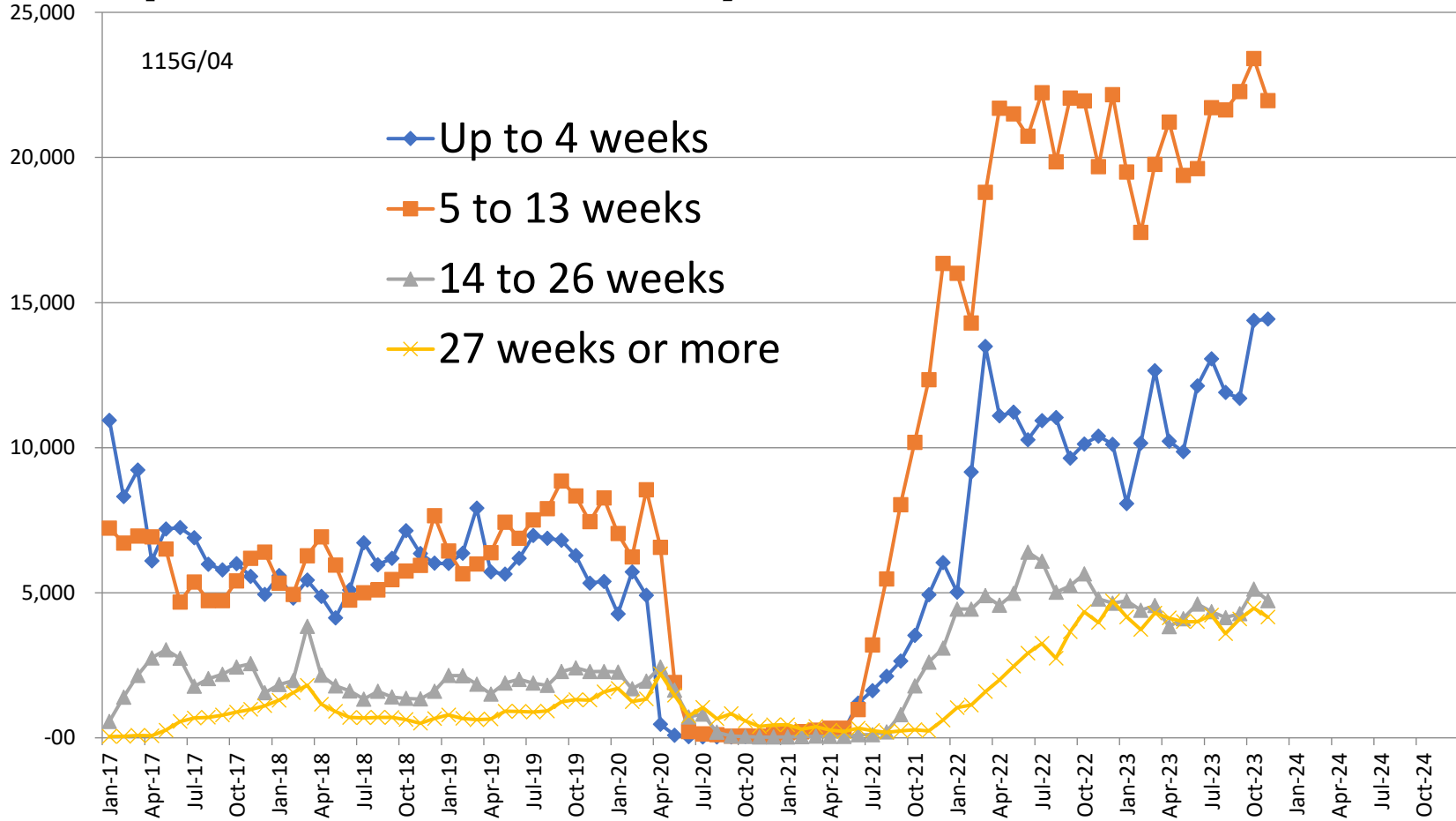


Note: Claimants in the 'working - with requirements' group were not subject to conditionality during the period covered by this chart

Duration of sanctions

- Each month there are now:
 - Over 20,000 claimants completing a sanction after 5 to 13 weeks
 - 4,000 after 14 to 26 weeks
 - 4,000 after 27 weeks or more
- Average sanction is 2.1 months
- Part of the problem is the 2012 Act introducing very long sanctions, but the biggest issue is 'low' and 'lowest' level sanctions which last 'until compliance'
- In practice it can be difficult for a claimant to demonstrate 'compliance' – DWP staff shortages may be contributing

UC (Full and Live Service): Monthly no. of completed sanctions by duration



Money lost through UC sanctions

- Estimates based on Parliamentary Answer 88916 to Chris Stephens MP, 22 Nov 2022, uprated for benefit increases and adjusted for updated data on sanction durations:
 - GB total lost £41.3m per month, £495.2m per year
 - Average lost per sanctioned claimant £643

Reasons for sanctions

- Since the moratorium there have been very few sanctions for anything other than 'failure to attend or participate in a work-focused interview' (95%)
- It appears that this is mainly because missing an interview is easily documented by overworked Jobcentre staff

The appeal system

- DWP has never published data on the working of the UC appeal system (Mandatory Reconsideration, Tribunal) for Full Service which has effectively covered all claimants since April 2019
- Old figures for Live Service up to 2017 showed challenges 16%, 29% of challenges successful, 5% of sanctions overturned
- Live Service covered only single claimants without dependants. Full figures might show more challenges being more successful

More information

- Available at:
- <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-research/latest-policy-briefings-and-reports/david-webster-briefings>
- To join the mailing list:
- Email david.webster@glasgow.ac.uk

Conditionality changes

- Recent changes in conditionality
- Proposed changes in conditionality
- Case studies from CPAG's advice line
- Discussion as we go along

Recent changes: part-time workers

- UC Administrative Earnings Threshold (AET) determines whether a claimant is in the 'working with requirements' group ('light touch') or the 'intensive work search' group
- AET has increased 3 times recently; & from 13/5/24 is:
 - single claimant £892pm earnings (18 hours)
 - couple £1 437pm earnings (29 hours)
- Expected will move another 100,000 claimants into the intensive work search group
- Plan to abolish couple rate entirely

Recent changes: parents

- Parent with 'main responsibility' - expected hours changed to 30 hours if child aged 3-12 (up from 16 or 25 hours)
- This is in DWP guidance
- Note that the law has not changed (UC Regs reg 88)
- Childcare (or lack of it) remains a factor
- More frequent work-focused interviews (WFIs) if youngest child aged 1 or 2

Proposed changes: disengaged claimants

- Those eligible for the UC standard allowance only and who have had open-ended sanction for over six months will have their claims 'closed'
- Needs primary legislation – proposed for next Parliament
- Numbers: about 3,200 claimants per month, or 39,000 per year would have their claims closed under the new proposal (based on July 2023 rates)
- Also proposing ramping up of intensive support for unemployed – 'Additional Jobcentre Support' pilot

Proposed changes: to LCW/RA

- To be renamed 'work preparation' and 'health group'
- 'More personalised system of support' - ie, conditionality possible for those in health group
- Changing 'getting about' descriptor is expected to move 33,000 from LCW to all work search
- 163,000 expected to fall within the LCW caseload rather than the LCWRA caseload due to the amended 'risk' descriptor
- 260,000 expected to be assessed as having LCW instead of LCWRA through removal of the 'mobilising' descriptor

Case study – MM from WTC to UC

“The UC scheme is humiliating on every level, from the initial interview whereby I had to prove that I was 'gainfully employed' and that my choice of career was of some worth... WTC has meant that I have been able to manage... but I have also managed to survive on a low income in a very rural setting by creating my own work and being adaptable... They have given me a year to prove that my business is viable and to increase my income by around £4000 which is highly unlikely; plus I have to send them my income and expenditure on a monthly basis... The whole thing is most upsetting and makes you feel as if you are some kind of naughty child... As with many other freelance professionals in the creative industries I live with a low grade anxiety about finances. The UC system has dialled that anxiety up to uncomfortable levels.”

Help for advisers in Scotland



Advice by telephone:
0141 552 0552

Monday to Thursday, 10am - 4pm,
Friday 10am - 12 noon

Advice by email:
advice@cpagscotland.org.uk

Free, independent, expert, up-to-date advice and information to frontline advisers and support staff on all aspects of the benefits and tax credits system.

More resources for advisers can be found at cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights