

THE ROLE OF SANCTIONS IN INTENSIVE SUPPORT AND REHABILITATION: RHETORIC, RATIONALITIES AND REALITIES

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Abstract *This article explores the use of sanction as a technique to secure the engagement of individuals with intensive support and rehabilitation programmes. Sanction and enforcement became increasingly prominent under the New Labour governments, within rhetoric and rationalities of 'non-negotiable support', 'gripping' and 'challenging' families and 'making them' engage. The linking of support to financial penalty or other legal enforcement action for non-compliance was a defining element of Parenting Orders and Family Intervention Projects. The new coalition government's 'rehabilitation revolution' is committed to retaining an emphasis upon early intervention, whole family approaches and parenting skills, with a (modified) continuation of enforcement action for non-engagement with support. This article explores the rhetoric, definitions and existing research evidence about the use of sanction in intensive intervention projects. It then presents evidence from recent evaluations of the Intensive Intervention Project programme and Housing Benefit Sanction pilots in England to identify the actual practices of sanction. The article concludes that 'non-negotiable' support is a fallacy; that sanctions and enforcement action are very limited in both their use and impacts; and that this has important implications for the new government's rehabilitation agenda.*

Keywords *Anti-social behaviour, coercion, intensive intervention projects, rehabilitation, sanctions.*

Introduction

This article explores the role played by sanction in 'evoking service user engagement' (Nixon *et al.*, 2010: 305) in two recent policy initiatives in England and the reliance on sanctions as a mechanism to transform human subjectivities (Schram *et al.*, 2008). New Labour's governance of anti-social behaviour and the rehabilitation of problematic and vulnerable families increasingly became equated with a 'triple track' approach of prevention, support and enforcement (Respect Task Force, 2006). In what has been termed 'coercive state-sponsored welfare' (Phoenix, 2008: 290), the provision of support to those engaged in anti-social behaviour became more closely aligned with sanction (Nixon *et al.*, 2010). Support was conceptualised as being 'non-negotiable' and it was the failure to accept, or engage with, this support that became the trigger for, and subject of,

sanction (see Flint & Hunter, 2010; Phoenix, 2008). This was operationalised through mechanisms such as Parenting Orders, where individuals subject to an order could be fined for failing to engage in support such as counselling sessions or parenting classes.

The growth of Family Intervention Projects (FIPs) in the later part of the New Labour years epitomised both a shift towards early intervention and intensive holistic whole family approaches, and an embedding of conditionality and sanction within support and rehabilitation mechanisms. Families were liable to further legal sanctions (such as Anti-social Behaviour Orders, Parenting Orders or possession actions in the case of social housing tenants) if they failed to engage and comply with the requirements of the FIPs, which deployed a mixture of persuasion and coercion (Garrett, 2007). The new coalition government's 'rehabilitation revolution' retains a focus upon early intervention, whole family approaches and parenting skills, and retains a (modified) emphasis on the use of sanctions to compel engagement with support. However, it also identifies a shift towards private and voluntary sector provision and Payment by Results, which have considerable implications for the use of sanctions in intensive intervention initiatives (Ministry of Justice, 2010a; 2010b; HM Government, 2010; Home Office, 2011).

This article specifically examines the policy rhetoric of sanction and non-negotiation in intensive intervention projects and the existing research evidence about their use and impact. It seeks to contribute to this evidence base by presenting findings from evaluations of the Intensive Intervention Project programme and the piloting of the sanction of Housing Benefit in England. Both initiatives combined the offer of intensive support packages with the potential sanctioning of non-compliance. The article is based on a limited methodology and further work will be required to locate the findings within the important theoretical frameworks offered by the literatures on regulation and criminal justice (Quirk *et al.*, 2010); restorative justice and the family (Braithwaite, 2004; Strang & Braithwaite, 2002); theories of motivation (Miller, 2003); and desistance and approach goals (McNeill & Weaver, 2010).

The article argues that policy rhetoric and rationalities of 'non-negotiable' support fail to be translated into practice. This is a result of governmental misunderstanding of the impact of potential sanctions on the subjectivities and conduct of individuals, the voluntary basis of intensive intervention and the primary influences upon behavioural change being located in the informal aspects of the relationship between the providers and subjects of support.

The rhetoric and rationalities of sanction and non-negotiation

The New Labour government prioritised addressing anti-social behaviour and its Respect Action Plan was based upon three rationalities of governance. First, that families were to be challenged through linking support to sanctions: 'we will challenge problem families to accept support to change their behaviour, backed up by enforcement measures' (Respect Task Force, 2006: 3). Second, that the state could 'grip' problem households and make them change their behaviour (*ibid*: 21). Third, that it was possible to 'make people who needed help to take it' (*ibid*: 1) and that 'households could be 'forced to take help' (*ibid*: 21). This was premised on the belief that sanctions, including financial penalties, could

provide 'a very strong incentive to encourage those households to undertake rehabilitation when they have refused other offers of help' (Respect Task Force, 2006: 23).

These rationalities were retained when Gordon Brown became Prime Minister, as he advocated the continued expansion of 'Family Intervention Projects with clear rules and clear punishments if they ['chaotic families'] don't stick to them' (Brown, 2009). The Children and Families Minister reiterated that Family Intervention Projects 'challenge and confront families' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010a) and the provision of support remained conceptualised as being 'non-negotiable' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010b: 3). These rationalities were also articulated within some local government initiatives, for example the Westminster Family Recovery Programme, where: 'in turn for the support offered, these families adhere to strict contracts with consequences, knowing that they could face a raft of measures if they do not co-operate to mend their ways[...]a twin-pronged approach[...]which achieves real results' (Local Government Leadership and Westminster Council, 2010: 4).

The new coalition government's 'rehabilitation revolution' continues the emphasis upon 'challenging people to be responsible for their actions and ensur[ing] that they are aware of the consequences of these actions' (HM Government, 2010: 10). The new Home Secretary reiterated the need for 'a simple, clear and effective sanctions regime' (May, 2010). The government wishes to make proposed new mechanisms, including Criminal Behaviour Orders and Crime Prevention Injunctions, 'more rehabilitative and restorative' (Home Office, 2011: 5-6) and to ensure that these mechanisms 'combine restrictions with support' (*ibid*: 10). They are defined as 'restorative sanctions with real consequences for non-compliance' (*ibid*: 13). These mechanisms are premised on requiring offenders to undertake positive activities (*ibid*: 11) with sanctions still conceptualised as providing 'a proper deterrent to the persistent minority' (*ibid*: 10). For example, the government will encourage Youth Offending Teams to make full use of Parenting Orders 'where parents refuse to face up to their responsibilities', arguing that these orders can 'compel' parents to attend programmes (Ministry of Justice, 2010a: 68).

The new Home Secretary was critical of New Labour's 'too complex and bureaucratic' sanction regime: 'if professionals don't understand them, then how on earth are the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour supposed to understand them? No wonder they don't act as a serious deterrent' (May, 2010). The new government also acknowledges that '[s]ome practitioners, particularly those working with young people and their parents, are reluctant to use formal support such as Parenting Orders or Individual Support Orders, preferring engagement to be on a voluntary basis' (Home Office, 2011: 10). A change of tone and, perhaps, ambition is further evident in the statement that the 'government will work with people who *want* to take the necessary steps' (HM Government, 2010: 4, emphasis added). This contrasts with previous government rationalities that 'everyone can change' (Respect Task Force, 2006: 1) and that it was possible for the state to force individuals to accept 'non-negotiable' support.

Definitions and forms of sanction

Evaluations of FIPs have examined the use of sanctions (White *et al.*, 2008; Jones *et al.*, 2006) and critics of FIPs have defined them as enforcement-led and sanctions-orientated, operating through 'a mixture of threats, parenting classes and 'intensive support'' (Gregg, 2010: 14; Garrett, 2007). However, Nixon *et al.* (2010: 318) argue that the terminology of 'sanction' has not been adequately defined and identify three forms of sanction action: challenging families to recognise unacceptable behaviour and the need for change; reporting child protection concerns to social services; and responding to non-cooperation by triggering enforcement actions. These may include Anti-social Behaviour Orders, Parenting Orders, care proceedings, prosecution for non-school attendance and evictions. Nixon *et al.* (2010) suggest that it is incorrect to label each of these simply as 'sanction' or 'coercion', particularly the challenging of families.

In addition to these three forms of sanctions, there are other potential techniques, including the withholding of rewards or personalised budget expenditure for families and more nebulous and subtle aspects of emotive chastising within the 'assertive and persistent' relationships (Parr, 2008) between project workers and users, in which users may be reluctant to let workers down or make them unhappy (see Pawson *et al.*, 2009). Public shaming mechanisms as a form of sanction have also been deployed in the governance of anti-social behaviour (see Powell & Flint, 2009), but these have not been linked directly to FIPs.

Existing research evidence

White *et al.* (2008) found that families were routinely threatened with sanction to secure initial engagement with FIPs and that using sanctions with support was a critical success feature of FIPs. Jones *et al.* (2006: 195) suggested that the combination of enforcement (from verbal warnings to eviction proceedings) and rehabilitation may be effective as perpetrators, forced to recognise the serious consequences of their behaviour, may be more willing to accept support. Similarly, the reported success of the Family Recovery Programme was partly attributed to: 'for most [families], this is the first time in their lives that they have been so clearly presented with an outline of their responsibilities by all the agencies involved and the consequences of not taking ownership of them' (Local Government Leadership and Westminster Council, 2010: 11).

However, White *et al.* (2008) also reported that the use of sanctions was limited by pragmatism, particularly in the early stages of securing engagement, and that balancing support with enforcement was a key challenge faced by FIP workers. Other studies have suggested that many workers were uncomfortable with support by compulsion, actively avoided methods of intervention associated with corrective or punitive methods and did not use sanctions or enforcement action (Ghate & Ramella, 2002; Parr, 2008; Pawson *et al.*, 2009; Nixon, *et al.*, 2010; Renshaw & Welling, 2010; see also Home Office, 2011). Rather, processes of challenging families and ensuring adherence to project support plans were linked to achieving service user engagement through building a positive, persistent and assertive personal relationship.

Many intensive intervention projects are premised on a voluntary engagement and the centrality of individuals 'choosing to change' (Renshaw & Welling, 2010: 31). The actual capacity to apply sanctions may also be limited. Some families were unaware of the enforcement element of the projects and that sanctions could be imposed upon them (White *et al.*, 2008). Although there is weak knowledge about why support may be refused, there are a range of barriers to engagement, including those related to gender, ethnicity and social class, that may not be amenable to resolution through the rationality-based mechanism of sanction (Jones *et al.*, 2006; Aldridge *et al.*, 2009; Flint & Hunter, 2010).

The practice of sanction in Intensive Intervention Projects

A national programme of 20 Intensive Intervention Projects (IIPs) was delivered in England between April 2009 and March 2011 as part of the Youth Task Force Action Plan (see Flint *et al.*, 2011a; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). These IIPs were conceptualised as being closely related to existing FIPs and based on similar core elements: a focus on anti-social behaviour, a key worker, a contract between the project and service users, intensive and holistic support based upon an assertive and persistent approach, and the coordination of multi-agency support. The local governance arrangements of the IIPs were often coordinated with FIPs or similar intensive intervention initiatives. The projects were targeted specifically at young people who were not receiving other forms of support or for whom previous interventions, including FIPs, had not been successful. The IIPs were expected to significantly reduce anti-social behaviour and crime, improve participation in education and training, tackle substance misuse, and reduce homelessness. The IIPs were envisaged as supporting young people aged eight to nineteen years old, with each IIP working with up to 50 young people per annum, with individual cases having a duration of six to twelve months.

Although, unlike many FIPs, IIPs were not necessarily linked directly to previous enforcement action or the threat of a loss of tenancy, sanctions to ensure engagement and compliance were a central element of IIP's conceptualisation. This was premised upon a contract-based approach to engaging young people and their families, which outlined the consequences of not changing behaviour in exchange for intensive support (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). Eight of the IIPs were delivered directly by local authorities, one IIP was delivered by a registered social landlord, and 11 IIPs were delivered by third sector organisations (including Barnardos, Catch22, CRI, Novas Scarman, Rathbone and YMCA). This predominance of third sector delivery had important consequences for the rationalities and practice of sanctions, as will be demonstrated below.

The evidence presented in this section is based on analysis, undertaken in December 2009, of the proposals to deliver IIPs submitted to the Department for Children, Schools and Families by the 20 successful local authorities. These proposals were made available to the author by the Department and, to protect confidentiality and anonymity, the material quoted below is not attributed to individual local authorities. Findings are also presented from two waves of interviews with the six regional IIP area lead officers and managers of 18 of the IIPs, conducted in November 2009 and September 2010, and

interviews with 13 project workers in five IIPs (Birmingham, Bolton, East Sussex, Gateshead and Northamptonshire), conducted in September 2010. For a full account of the evaluation methodology (and its weaknesses) and the findings, see Flint *et al.* (2011a). For reasons of confidentiality, quotations from practitioners have been anonymised.

The analysis of the IIP proposals submitted by the successful local authorities found that (as may be anticipated in a competitive exercise to secure funding) they reflected the rhetoric and rationalities of national policy. They emphasised the 'triple track' approach of early intervention, 'non-negotiable' support (or 'making clear the consequences of non-compliance') and 'tough' enforcement action (including Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, Anti-social Behaviour Orders, Individual Support Orders, Parenting Contracts, and supplementary tenancy agreements). The proposals reified the belief in the capacity to 'ensure that change is effected' and that 'the right enforcement measure[...]could provide the greatest incentive to change'. This capacity to effect change was also located within 'persistent', 'assertive' and 'tenacious' practitioners who would 'challenge' families, who 'would not take no for an answer' and 'who will not go away'. The proposals also detailed 'a carrot and stick approach', which included 'incentives to promote compliance', and less formal sanctions, such as 'exclusion from activities'.

However, interviews with IIP area lead officers, managers and workers indicated that the reality of practice in utilising sanctions was very different. One IIP utilised Acceptable Behaviour Contracts in conjunction with project contracts, another IIP stated that it actively promoted the use of sanctions, and a third IIP had developed a 'widely used' sanctions policy that included activities such as litter picking. However, in many IIPs the use of formal sanctions was limited or non-existent. It was evident that the complexity of the relationship between support and sanction had been underestimated in the original conceptualisation and rationalities of the IIPs. The majority of IIPs were delivered by third sector organisations, which had an explicit ethos of voluntary, empowering and therapeutic engagement and were not necessarily linked into the formal sanctioning processes of other agencies: 'the reality is that we don't use sanctions as we don't have the authority or power legislatively' (IIP Manager).

Some IIP practitioners believed that the lack of consequences for disengagement could be a weakness and there was recognition that 'the threat of sanctions can go either way depending on the young person' (IIP manager). One IIP manager also argued that the use of formal mechanisms, such as Acceptable Behaviour Contracts and the threat of escalating sanctions, could empower young people to resist peer-group pressure. However, the purchase that formal enforcement sanctions had on young people and their families was widely viewed as being limited in terms of influencing engagement and behavioural change: 'we are heavily focused on support rather than sanctions as parents and young people have already experienced sanctions and these have not resulted in long term and sustainable change' (IIP Manager). One IIP had ceased to operate a 'three strikes and you are out' policy precisely because of its ineffectiveness.

The strengths of IIPs included project workers being differentiated from statutory agencies, such as the police and social services, and utilising a non-judgemental approach.

Both of these elements would be compromised if IIPs were directly linking assessments of engagement to the formal enforcement procedures of other agencies. It was also acknowledged that young people were often at their most vulnerable when they disengaged from an IIP and that enforcement action may exacerbate this exclusion: 'further non-engagement is the likely outcome of coming down with a heavy hand' (IIP Manager).

There were two techniques that IIPs primarily deployed to promote engagement and the take-up of support. Many practitioners indicated that the terminology of 'sanction' had not been helpful in conceptualising these approaches. The first approach was the widespread use of rewards as an incentive and the withdrawal or postponement of these rewards as an informal mechanism of sanction. IIPs used a combination of generic or group awards, such as high street shopping vouchers or trips to leisure activities and individualised 'incentivised rewards', including sports, music or arts activities. These were viewed as stimulating engagement and a commitment to change and could be a 'lever to barter, for example rewarding attendance at school or not being involved in anti-social behaviour' (IIP Area Lead Officer). Rewards also provided a mechanism for working through young people's personal interests and reaffirming the capacity of project workers to bring about positive consequences (or to withhold them). But rewards were also important in fostering ownership and choice amongst young people. One young person chose to take their family out for a meal and another young person requested that their rewards be saved and accumulated towards a holiday with their terminally ill parent. The use and removal of rewards was widely viewed as being an effective mechanism for facilitating the take-up of support, especially when the links between reward/non-reward and required behaviour and goals were made explicit.

The second key technique was the relationship that was fostered between IIP workers and young people and their families: 'in many cases it is the relationship with the support worker rather than the threat of sanctions that is most crucial in securing client engagement' (IIP Manager). It was through the often difficult process of establishing this relationship that change could be achieved: 'unless you build a rapport with a young person, that relationship, which sometimes takes three, four, five months, there is no point trying to deliver anything because they will simply disengage from step one' (IIP Worker). Once this relationship had been established, a persistent and assertive approach was important: 'we have to prove that we are not like the others [agencies], we're not going to write letters and just expect them to respond, we will be at their door' (IIP Worker).

This reflected IIP workers' understanding that young people's engagement with a project did not occur in a social or emotional vacuum in which the quasi-legal and contract-based rationalities of sanction or threat of enforcement were of primary significance: 'you can only work with where the families are at, not where they 'should' be and values cannot be imposed' (IIP Worker). Rather, a range of vulnerabilities and relationships influenced and constrained young people's spaces of action: 'they're doing stuff because they haven't a choice[...][amongst peers] you're either one of us or against us and you're either a victim or you'll go along with it' (IIP Worker).

This did not mean that young people or their families were not encouraged to be reflective: 'it depends on an honest dialogue that says to a young person "that's just not acceptable" [...] the child must be allowed to reflect back to us' (IIP Manager). This honest dialogue, which did necessitate being 'upfront and personal', involved a more complex understanding of 'challenging' individuals: 'you are there to guide them and not just challenge them. You're there to tell them why that would not be right and support them to go the right way' (IIP Worker). It was not, therefore, simply a case of 'telling young people what to do' but, rather, requesting them to reflect on their behaviour and offering them strategies for change. This guidance extended to the perceived role of IIP workers to 'stand by the side' of young people in meeting the conditions of any enforcement orders that they were subject to and providing reassurance and fostering self-belief in the young people's ability to meet the requirements of these orders.

In a reversal of the logics of sanction for non-engagement, it was the positive relationships and activities provided by IIPs, and the threat of potential disengagement from them, that could often be a source of motivation:

We have developed a rapport with these [young people] signed up to a contract so that a majority appreciate the supportive interventions and make those [required] changes as they are aware of the risk of losing the support of our services. (IIP Manager)

The evidence from IIPs therefore suggests that securing the support and cooperation of young people and their families and the ability to informally challenge them, coupled with the use and withholding of rewards, were the central mechanisms in facilitating engagement and behavioral change, rather than recourse to formal sanctions or enforcement.

The sanction of housing benefit

The Welfare Reform Act 2007 enabled the piloting of sanctions of housing benefit payments in eight local authorities between October 2007 and October 2009 (see Flint *et al.*, 2011b; Flint & Hunter, 2010). Tiered deductions in this benefit payment could be applied in cases where members of a household previously subject to an order of possession on a rented property on the grounds of anti-social behaviour refused to engage with an offer of appropriate support. The sanction was a fiscal penalty of 10%, 20% or ultimately 100% of housing benefit payments, with the explicit aim of encouraging individuals to engage with support. The guidance issued by the Department for Work and Pensions (2007a; 2007b) indicated that individuals with mental health needs should not be considered for sanction and that a maximum sanction of 30% of benefit could be applied to households demonstrating financial hardship. The guidance also required decisions to be taken on a case by case basis, overseen by a multi-agency panel, support packages to be available and appropriate, and individuals had to be given a reasonable period to engage with the support offered (Department for Work and Pensions, 2007a; 2007b).

The evidence presented in this section is based upon documentary analysis and four waves of interviews and focus groups conducted with practitioners involved in the establishment and operation of the eight local authority sanction pilot areas, conducted between October 2007 and October 2009. In addition, interviews were conducted with a very small sample of individuals subject to anti-social behaviour interventions in one sanction pilot area. For a full account of the evaluation methodology (and its weaknesses) and the findings, see Flint *et al.* (2011b). For reasons of confidentiality, quotations from practitioners have been anonymised.

The operation of the sanction pilots provided further evidence that, despite the policy rhetoric and rationalities of coercion and sanction, which critical scholars often use as evidence of a more punitive turn in social and family policy (Garrett, 2007; Gregg, 2010), the empirical reality of delivery and practice is more prosaic, mundane and limited. Not one individual or household was subject to a sanction of housing benefit during the two-year pilot period. In part, this was due to the technical inability of government and court agencies to establish the required database and communication processes. There were also flaws in the basic conceptualisation of the technical aspects of applying the sanction. New forms of probationary tenancy linked to anti-social behaviour removed the need for a possession order and, therefore, the potential eligibility of some households for sanction. In addition, the fact that, at the time of the pilot period, housing benefit payments were primarily transferred direct to landlords rather than to tenants meant that there would be no immediate notable impact on individuals' financial circumstances (and the possible scenario of a local authority sanctioning its own rental income).

Practitioners in one pilot authority reported that warnings issued about the potential of a housing benefit sanction had been 'instrumental' in some households engaging with support packages:

There's got to be something because if not they'll ignore us...its not just about giving them support, its about giving them the motivation to change[...]these families don't take any notice of what's being said. Now we've got enforcement to say this is non-negotiable support[...]it's a bargaining tool if you like, but there's got to be sanctions there[...]as long as there's some sort of enforcement tool then we can negotiate with them[...]there needs to be the threat there. (Anti-social Behaviour Manager)

Some practitioners also accepted that the threat of a sanction may offer further leverage with individuals. However, most practitioners in the pilot areas, where warnings about sanctions of housing benefit had been utilised, generally perceived that these had little or no impact. These practitioners critiqued the conceptual basis of a future-orientated and fiscal penalty. First, it was argued that individuals' understanding of the processes and consequences of the sanction were very limited: 'I don't know how much they take on board[...]the fact that they end up going to court probably reflects the fact that it doesn't have a lot of impact' (Anti-social Behaviour Officer). Some further limited evidence to support this perception was provided by interviews with four individuals subject to anti-social behaviour interventions in one pilot area. These revealed that none of the

individuals were aware of the sanction and its consequences, even though it had been communicated to them verbally and in writing.

Second, the tough rhetoric enforcement and potential consequences did not necessarily translate as a meaningful risk for those subject to potential sanction: '[individuals] assume threats won't materialise, it's not going to happen and it doesn't matter what you say to them' (Anti-social Behaviour Officer). Third, the future-orientated and economic rationality that the sanction was premised upon did not always achieve traction with the subjects of intervention: 'individuals liable to receive a warning about a potential housing benefit sanction live from day to day in the majority of cases and to mention something that is so far away means nothing. They don't grasp it' (Anti-social Behaviour Officer).

Practitioners recognised the difficulty of disaggregating the role or impact of a specific sanction, or threat of sanction, within the range of factors that may influence changes in subjectivities and conduct. The weakness of the evidence base about the actual relationship between sanction and the take-up of support should be remembered, despite the confident governmental discourse about the efficacy of such mechanisms. This complexity also extended to questions about how 'necessary engagement' with support packages should be assessed and whether those delivering support packages could retain a positive relationship with users if there was this additional monitoring function to their role. One final fundamental lesson emerged from this pilot initiative. The sanction of housing benefit was conceptualised and designed as a post-eviction mechanism. The fact that the threat and actuality of losing the family home had not been sufficient in some cases to facilitate behavioural change should, in itself, be cause for reflection in policy about the efficacy of fiscal penalties in such cases, and the particular governmental understanding of the relationship between consequences and conduct underpinning them.

Conclusions

The new government's 'rehabilitation revolution' (Ministry of Justice, 2010a; 2010b; Home Office, 2011), through the Early Intervention Grant programme, retains New Labour's prioritisation of whole family intensive support and a focus upon parenting skills (Ministry of Justice, 2010b; HM Government, 2010; Home Office, 2011). It also continues, through the mechanisms of Parenting Orders and the proposed Crime Prevention Order and Crime Prevention Injunction, to promote sanctions as a technique for compelling engagement with support (Home Office, 2011). The government recognises that previous sanctions may not have been understood by those subject to them and that sanctions should be 'simpler[...]and where possible rehabilitating and restorative rather than criminalising and coercive' (May, 2010). However, it retains a belief in 'tough sanctions' that 'provide a real deterrent' (May, 2010). Nevertheless, there are complexities and tensions between enforcement and support and these are manifested in gaps between governance rhetoric and rationalities and the realities of grounded practice (Parr & Nixon, 2009; McKee, 2010). Most intensive intervention projects contain a coercive element as families face the (explicit or implicit) threat of consequences if they are perceived not to 'engage' sufficiently or appropriately, but these are not merely disciplinary interventions (Nixon et

al., 2010: 320). Rather, they are based on a practice of meaningful engagement and reasoning with families, not simply policing or challenging them (Parr, 2008).

There is a need for policy to better understand how 'families navigate their way through the maze of permissive and punitive policies and practices' (Morris & Featherstone, 2010: 557) and to acknowledge the range of barriers to the take-up of support, rooted in vulnerability and wider social influences (Aldridge *et al.*, 2009). This requires an explicit acceptance that 'non-negotiable' support is a fallacy and that the capacity of the state to 'force' individuals to accept help is limited. These misunderstandings within governmentalities, and the consequent emphasis on sanctions within them, arise from the quasi-legal, contractual and economic-rationality paradigms that they are embedded within.

More likely to bring about engagement with support packages is what one practitioner termed 'a clear and non-negotiable structure of expectation' in which the persistent and assertive approach of intensive interventions are based upon the positive relationships established with families, with an emphasis on guidance and reflection rather than simplistic notions of 'challenge'. This requires both the commitment of resources to enable these relationships to be established (Parr, 2008) and an understanding of the wider emotional, psychological, economic and social influences on individuals that cannot be addressed primarily through a sanctions regime. As the new government seeks to enhance the role of the voluntary sector in intensive support and rehabilitation services, and to reduce 'top-down state intervention' (Ministry of Justice, 2010a; 2010b; HM Government, 2010), the use of formal sanction to facilitate user engagement is likely to become increasingly divorced from the ethos and effectiveness of these initiatives unless the research findings described herein are taken on board.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the two anonymous referees for their insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this article.

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