

Scottish Campaign  
on Welfare Reform



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Our welfare system is badly in need of reform. The value of basic benefits, around £65.00 per week is so low that it falls well below the UK government's own definition of poverty leaving many people struggling to adequately feed and clothe themselves. The system lacks compassion and respect for the dignity of individuals. Under Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) rules even those with a terminal illness can be required to attend work focused interviews that too often feel pointless and humiliating. Proposals to reform the care system including the suggested abolition of Attendance Allowance (AA), with funding given to local authorities instead of individuals, would undermine disabled peoples' right to decide things for themselves.

Recent welfare reforms have focused on getting people into work at any cost as the key route out of poverty. Yet increasing numbers of people are being forced into low paid, unfulfilling jobs which undermine their own and their families' health and wellbeing. At the same time an immense amount of unpaid work in caring for young children, for ill and disabled friends and relatives or socially worthwhile volunteering goes unrewarded.

Against a background of inaccurate and discriminatory media stories which too often demonise claimants, the system increasingly focuses on blaming individuals for being out of work. Meanwhile the real barriers to employment such as lack of childcare, employer

discrimination, below poverty level wages and the lack of jobs are not tackled effectively. Many lone parents are required to engage in stressful work seeking activities despite inadequate childcare provision in some areas.

The successive introduction of new benefits with even more conditions attached has resulted in a system so complex people often don't know what they are entitled to and are frequently plunged into financial crisis every time their circumstances change. The system is expensive to administer and badly under funded leaving staff facing impossible demands. It is time to stop tinkering with the system and make some fundamental changes. We are campaigning for the following key reforms:

- ***Increase benefit rates to a level where no one is left in poverty and all have sufficient income to lead a dignified life***
- ***Make respect for human rights and dignity the cornerstone of a new approach to welfare***
- ***Radically simplify the welfare system***
- ***Invest in the support needed to enable everyone to participate fully in society***
- ***Make welfare benefits in Scotland, suitable for Scotland.***

## What would these **KEY REFORMS** mean in practice?

### ***Increase benefit rates to a level where no one is left in poverty and all have sufficient income to lead a dignified life***

- Levels of basic benefits should match Minimum Income Standards, currently calculated by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as £158.00 per week. This figure is based on what members of the public think is the minimum that is currently required to enable an individual to meet their needs and live with dignity
- Those who are ill or disabled should get additional help to cover the extra costs incurred through ill health.

### ***Make respect for human rights and dignity the cornerstone of a new approach to welfare***

- In the short term, urgently review ESA and changes made to force lone parents off income support with the aim of ensuring that reforms which fail to treat claimants with dignity are rolled back
- Scrap proposals that plan to abolish AA and threaten disability benefits, and ensure that benefits provide a cornerstone for a new fairer system of care for people of all ages
- Support carers by up rating Carers Allowance to Minimum Income Standards
- Make benefit and job seeking services accountable at a local level to service users with the aim of ensuring that all claimants are treated with dignity and receive an excellent service.

### ***Radically simplify the welfare system***

- Harmonise the tax credits and benefit systems, as much as possible, so that people can move in and out of work without financial disruption
- Substantially up rate the earnings disregard to remove barriers to paid employment

- Increase the proportion of non means tested financial support. Non means tested support is simpler, easier to administer and does not suffer the stigma often attached to means-tested support
- Extend universal benefits, the simplest way to deliver benefits, by:
  - Making child benefit pay equally for every child
  - Ensuring that a state pension is sufficient to enable all pensioners to live in dignity
  - Extending DLA to those over 65 and end age discrimination.

### ***Invest in the support needed to enable everyone to participate fully in society***

- Make employment in benefit and job seeking support services more fulfilling and better rewarded
- Give guaranteed access to a well resourced wide range of employment services to all those who are seeking work, including non claimants
- Invest in free or affordable, accessible, high quality childcare focused on the wellbeing of the child, as a right for all parents enabling them to engage fully in society
- Provide adequate support to all carers, including young carers
- Make childcare available to those in paid work, further education and training as well as carers and volunteers in recognition of the importance of unpaid and caring work in society.

### ***Make welfare benefits in Scotland, suitable for Scotland***

- Ensure that all welfare benefit reform takes account of the different legislative framework in Scotland so that it is integrated with Scottish childcare, education, training and other key devolved areas of responsibility.

The fact that in a rich country like the UK there are people who cannot afford to feed and clothe themselves properly or pay their bills is simply not acceptable, nor is it necessary, even in a recession. In fact, during a recession when more and more people find themselves out of work adequate benefits are more important than ever. Of course, raising benefit levels to Minimum Income Standards would represent a sizable investment in welfare spending. However this would lead to significant savings in the longer term, slashing the costs of poverty to society and removing barriers to paid employment. The immediate costs would

also be substantially offset by the savings generated by a radical simplification of the current system. In addition, insuring against the risks of ill health, disability or unemployment is something which everyone benefits from and for which we should all, as a society, take collective responsibility for, ensuring that costs are met in a fair and equitable way. Other European countries support a much more generous welfare system and there is no reason why we cannot afford to do likewise. This will benefit everyone - not just those on low income - a more equal society is one where everyone is happier and healthier and communities flourish.

The Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform is a coalition of over 40 key third sector organisations and individuals from across Scotland. Members include:

**Action for Children Scotland**

**Archibald Foundation**

**Capability Scotland**

**Care Co-ordination Network UK**

**Carr-Gomm Scotland**

**Citizens Advice Scotland**

**CPAG in Scotland**

**Energy Action Scotland**

**Faith in Community Scotland**

**Fife Gingerbread**

**Glasgow Disability Alliance**

**Inclusion Scotland**

**One Parent Families Scotland**

**Oxfam**

**Public & Commercial Services Union Scotland**

**Rosemount Lifelong Learning**

**Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People**

**Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations**

**Scottish Trade Union Congress**

**Scottish Women's Convention**

**Turning Point Scotland**

**The Iona Community**

**The Poverty Alliance**

**and other committed individuals.**

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