

SCOTTISH ANTI POVERTY REVIEW



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IS THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT
TACKLING POVERTY?

MARKING 25 YEARS OF DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT



EDITORIAL TEAM

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The Poverty Alliance

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ABOUT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

The Poverty Alliance exists to combat poverty in Scotland by working with people and communities to affect change. We act as the national anti-poverty network in Scotland, engaging with voluntary organisations, policy makers and politicians. Our vision is of a sustainable Scotland free of poverty, with dignity and social and economic justice for all.

We will tackle poverty by working with individuals, organisations and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources. To do this, we will:

- support the development of policies and practices which promote social justice and combat poverty
- work with people and communities experiencing poverty to help them challenge poverty
- build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland
- raise awareness and change attitudes about poverty

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WELCOME

CONTENTS

PAGE

Editorial – Peter Kelly: Finding Our Voice	3
The Scottish Parliament After 25 years: What Progress on Poverty? Stephen Sinclair	4
Too often, the fight against poverty is lost in political argy-bargy Alison Watson	7
Public Services 25 years on - Lilian Macer	9
Gender budgeting and the Scottish Parliament: Reflections on the past and hopes for the future Sara Cowan	11
Our Parliament must deliver: People’s lives depend on it Kevin Mitchell	14
‘A Man’s a Man’	17



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EDITORIAL

Finding Our Voice

Peter Kelly, Director, Poverty Alliance.

There has been much reflection this year on the 25th anniversary of the Scottish Parliament. Those of us involved in campaigning against poverty, for a more equal and socially just Scotland have much to reflect on as this important milestone is reached. As I have been reflecting on the Parliament's birthday, I have been thinking about those political events that made me convinced of the need for powers to be brought to Scotland.

The anti-poll tax movement in Scotland in the late 1980s was a very clear demonstration that decisions were being made that were not in the best interests of working-class people that lived here. I joined the rallies and marches, and as part of a UK wide movement, eventually saw the poll tax defeated. It was a clear lesson in the role of organised communities challenging unjust decisions.

The other event was the Scotland Together rally that was held in Glasgow's George Square the day after the 1992 election result. I joined with thousands of others a very wide range of campaigners and activists, who, once again, felt that the political will of Scotland was not being represented at Westminster. The need for a Scottish Parliament had become glaringly obvious to many people at this point.

So that demand was fulfilled in 1999. Since then, the Poverty Alliance have been enthusiastic and challenging contributors to the life of the Parliament. From the outset we have sought to ensure that the voices of grassroots civil society organisations and of people who have experienced poverty are heard by MSPs. We wanted to see a Parliament that was open and engaging, that was closer to the people and more responsive to their needs and hopes. Above all we wanted to see a Parliament that would help to deliver real change for people who were experiencing poverty.

Have the hopes and ambitions for the Parliament been realised? Like many of the authors in this edition of the Scottish Anti-Poverty Review, we have to say that these early ambitions have been partly delivered. On the openness of the Parliament, it is undoubtedly the case that getting a hearing in the Scottish Parliament is a more likely prospect for many civil society organisations compared with attempts to engage at Westminster. This is partly due to geography, but it is more to do with the approach of the institution here. The founding principles remain a genuine guide for action within the Scottish Parliament, and we have seen many examples over the years of where the Parliament has reached out to listen to the views of those who seldom get a hearing.

No doubt there's more to do, but this is a Parliament that strives to meaningfully engage with the people that live here. Of course, that openness does not necessarily mean that decisions always go the way that many anti-poverty campaigners would wish, that's democracy after all, but here too we can see real progress. Over the years we have seen important approaches to social justice and addressing poverty developed by the Scottish Government (previously Executive) and scrutinised by the Parliament. Professor Sinclair highlights the various approaches that have been adopted over the last 25 years – from the Social Justice Milestones to the Child Poverty delivery plans. Others have highlighted some of the important legislation that has been passed, supporting improvements in health and education, as well as introducing new and important social security entitlements.

As this edition of the Review shows, much has been achieved by the Parliament over the last 25 years. But it is incontestable that the deep-rooted patterns of poverty and inequality have not yet been dealt a decisive blow by the those elected to Holyrood. Some of this is down to the results of the actions of a UK Parliament that has too often introduced policies that actively create rather than reduce poverty. It is also down to fact that our economy and system of taxation still work to reproduce and embed those patterns of inequality that exist across the UK. We are tied to very similar approaches and systems, despite our efforts to create 'Scottish solutions to Scottish problems.'

If the Scottish Parliament is to deliver not only on the ambitions attached to it 25 years ago, but also on the legally binding commitments it has made more recently to end child poverty, it will need to break those ties. It will need to find more radical and impactful solutions than those currently on offer.

We can help. Civil society organisations across Scotland need to find their radicalism too, we need to tap into the energy and vision that fuelled the movement in the 1980s and '90s that led to the creation of the Parliament. We need to exert more pressure, both outside and inside the Parliament, to make change happen. Ultimately, it is our Parliament, we need to ensure that it listens to us, and that the welcome positive rhetoric becomes meaningful change.

Peter Kelly
Director



THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT AFTER 25 YEARS: WHAT PROGRESS ON POVERTY?



Stephen Sinclair is Chair of the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission and Professor of Social Policy and Co-director of the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit at Glasgow Caledonian University.

The Scottish Parliament was reconvened in 1999 with considerable optimism and high expectations. There were hopes for a new style of politics and adventurous policy laboratories which would develop distinctive ‘Scottish solutions for Scottish problems’¹. One quarter of a century later, the reality has not quite lived up to these hopes and, despite several positive developments and some notable accomplishments, this is evident in relation to progress in reducing poverty.

The positive features and achievements of anti-poverty policy in Scotland over the past 25 years deserve recognition and applause. The prominence of poverty on the political agenda, the tone of the debate and the style of policy have all been more positive in Scotland than in the UK generally for much of the last 25 years, particularly since 2010. For example, it is striking that Scotland’s current First Minister has stated clearly and repeatedly that ‘Eradicating child poverty will be the single most important objective of my government – and work in other priority areas will support and drive that mission’². That is not the kind of statement we have heard recently from any British Prime Minister, at least not since the UK Child Poverty Act was effectively repealed. In addition, the divisive language pitting ‘hard working strivers’ against undeserving ‘skivers’ which has characterised much of the rhetoric of UK anti-poverty policy for at least the past decade and a half, has largely been absent from Scottish politics. Instead, there is widespread recognition that social protection is a human right and an investment which forms an indispensable part of a collective social wage. This refreshingly positive discourse is expressed in such measures as the creation of a Social Security Charter – developed in collaboration with service users and experts by experience – and efforts to promote benefit uptake and maximise incomes as citizens’ rights.

Underpinning these distinctive qualities has been a more consultative and collaborative style of social policy-making. Successive Scottish Governments and Executives have shown a willingness to engage with civil society in policy deliberation. This started with the Scottish Social Inclusion Network in 1999 and continues with the current Child Poverty Programme Board³.

In part, this more consultative approach reflects the fact that most Scottish Governments have been either coalitions or minority administrations, which favours or requires some degree of partnership and power sharing. However, a further reason is that Scotland is a ‘small associative society’ with short connections and dense networks between many of the main institutions and key figures in the polity⁴.

There has been no lack of anti-poverty policies in Scotland since 1999. Among the most prominent initiatives have been the Social Justice Milestones (1999-2004); Closing the Opportunity Gap (2004-07); the Achieving Our Potential framework (2008); successive child poverty strategies and delivery plans since 2011, and the Fairer Scotland Action Plan (2016). A full account of all these measures would require a book rather than this brief overview, but they include some important developments and conspicuous successes. This is particularly the case in relation to social security where, following the Scotland Act 2016, significant new powers were devolved to the Scottish Parliament.

Following this, Parliament passed the Social Security (Scotland Act) 2018 and the Scottish Government set up Social Security Scotland to deliver a range of new welfare benefits, including important support for disabled people, carers, and the early years. These reforms were accompanied by other important measures, such as preserving the Educational Maintenance Allowance, mitigating the effects of the underoccupation penalty (‘bedroom tax’), establishing the Scottish Welfare Fund and passing the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the combined effect of the benefits and Income Tax changes in Scotland that came into effect in April 2023 has increased the incomes of families with children in the bottom third of the income distribution by around £1,200 per year (around 4%–5% of their incomes)⁵.

1 https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-16-06-1999?meeting=4168&iob=26619#orscontributions_M1972E147P238C704534

2 <https://www.gov.scot/news/priorities-for-scotland/>

3 <https://www.gov.scot/groups/tackling-child-poverty-programme-board/>

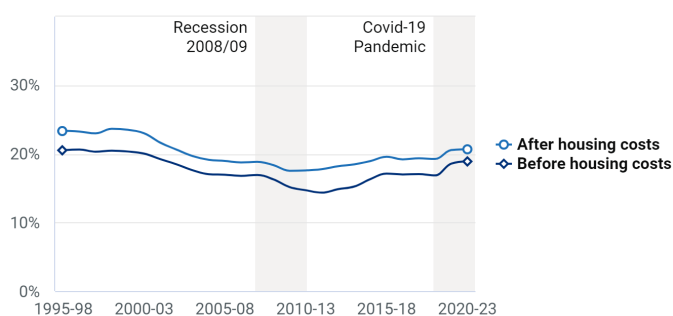
4 Fawcett, H. (2005) ‘Social Exclusion in Scotland and the UK: Devolution and the Welfare State’, ESRC Programme on Devolution and Constitutional Change, Briefing No. 22.

5 <https://ifs.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-02/R242-Analysis-of-scottish-tax-and-benefit-reforms.pdf>



Nevertheless, despite such important inroads, any review of the overall record on poverty since 1999 must regrettably conclude that Scotland has not yet succeeded in what the former Independent Advisor on Poverty and Inequality described as ‘shifting the curve’.⁶ The data on this is consistent and compelling, as shown by Figure 1.

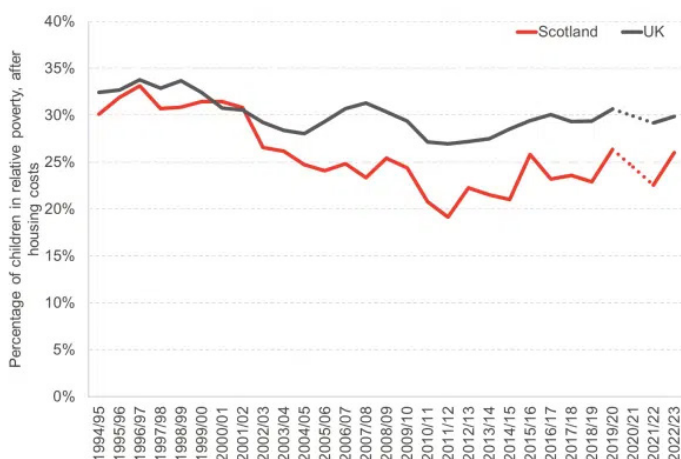
Figure 1: Proportion of People in Relative Poverty, Scotland 1995-98 to 2020-23 (three-year averages)



Source: Scottish Government Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland 2020-23, analysis of data from Family Resources Survey⁷

Looking in particular at child poverty - for which the Scottish Parliament has agreed statutory targets – it is evident that progress since 1999 has been patchy and partial, albeit better than that achieved in the UK as a whole.

Figure 2: Relative Child Poverty in Scotland and UK, 1994/95 – 2022/23 (single year data as is used for measurement against Scotland’s statutory targets)



Source: Fraser of Allander Institute analysis of Family Resources Survey, 2020/21 data removed due to data quality issues during the pandemic⁸

were living in relative poverty (after housing costs) in 2020-23, amounting to 240,000 children each year. While this is seven percentage points below the 1999-2002 level, the percentage rate remains essentially unchanged since the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act was passed in 2017.⁹ Therefore, despite numerous strategies, the overall effect has failed to match the ambitions set out in the strategies. As long ago as 2019 the Poverty and Inequality Commission warned that ‘If the Scottish Government is to have any chance of tackling poverty effectively and meeting its statutory targets on child poverty, it will need to take sustained action and invest considerably more than current levels. Future levels of funding must meet the scale of the challenge’.¹⁰ This message still stands.

What prevents Scotland from achieving its ambitions to significantly reduce poverty and inequality? Undoubtedly some of UK governments actions have not helped. In particular, chronically low benefits, harmful aspects of Universal Credit (notably the five week wait for support and lower payments for claimants aged under 25), the two-child limit and benefit cap are only some of the more egregious measures. However, the Scottish Parliament now possesses most of the powers which other countries exercise to reduce poverty. In some cases, Scottish policy makers have chosen not to make full use of these powers, as noted in the Poverty and Inequality Commission’s recent report on taxation.¹¹

Beyond this there are more fundamental factors which no Scottish (nor UK) Parliament has addressed. We have a poverty-producing economy which forces too many people into damaging circumstances from which it is difficult to escape. The traps and barriers of this dysfunctional economy are familiar to policy makers and those who must live with them: insecure employment, irregular and insufficient paid hours, low pay and a labour market often incompatible with care responsibilities. These hazards are often layered upon legacies of inherited disadvantages, so that for many people life is a chronic struggle and stressful challenge, heightening the risk of ‘deaths of despair’.¹² Our current welfare system deals with the consequences of these structural failings, and as a result will only ever make a limited impact upon them. What is needed instead of downstream amelioration is an economy geared towards upstream prevention. Effective anti-poverty measures must be built into employment, tax, childcare, education, and planning policies so that economic redistribution limits the need for welfare redistribution. As the First Minister has said, ‘A strategic approach is clearly essential’ if poverty is to systematically reduced¹³.

6 <https://povertyinequality.scot/archived-posts/what-has-happened-since-shifting-the-curve/>

7 https://data.gov.scot/poverty/#All_people

8 <https://fraserofallander.org/new-child-poverty-statistics-for-scotland-are-we-on-track-for-the-interim-targets/>

9 <https://data.gov.scot/poverty/#Children>

10 <https://povertyinequality.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Poverty-and-Inequality-Commissions-response-to-the-Scottish-Budget.pdf> (emphasis in the original).

11 <https://povertyinequality.scot/publication/how-better-tax-policy-can-reduce-poverty-and-inequality/>



THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT AFTER 25 YEARS: WHAT PROGRESS ON POVERTY?



“...the Scottish Parliament now possesses most of the powers which other countries exercise to reduce poverty.”

The current interest in developing a Wellbeing Economy which would address these structural factors is therefore welcome, but it has to be made real and effective.¹⁴

In this context, the principal challenges are political rather than technical policy matters. The Scottish Government and Parliament deserve credit for passing the Child Poverty Act and committing to reduce poverty. This is a unique and laudable aspiration. But such a radical commitment requires radical action; slightly improved versions of current practice are not enough. The Scottish Child Payment shows what can be achieved when government is focused and commits to taking action at scale. Similar decisiveness is required on all of the key drivers of poverty.

Above all, to significantly reduce poverty and inequality we need a new way of working that matches the scale of the challenge faced and change required.

Parties must act together in the spirit which reconvened the Scottish Parliament after almost 300 years. There is a prevailing sense across the UK that things are not working well and conditions are worsening. This is not only dispiriting but politically dangerous. People need hope and belief restored that the future is not to be feared and offers more than managed decline. Scotland has a chance to do something different and better. In the end, the quality of a Parliament is not measured by its debates but its decisions. The Scottish Parliament has decided to eradicate poverty. It is now time to deliver.

¹² <https://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view,sir-angus-deaton-a-lot-of-people-feel-theyre-not-in-control-of-their-lives-anymore>

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/economic-approach-first-minister-speech-17-2024/>

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/groups/wellbeing-economy-governments-wego/>



TOO OFTEN, THE FIGHT AGAINST POVERTY IS LOST IN POLITICAL ARGY-BARGY



Alison Watson is Shelter Scotland Director

“Is there for honest poverty, that hangs his head, and a’ that?”.

These were among the earliest words uttered, and certainly the first words sang, in the new Scottish Parliament as it celebrated its opening in 1999. As she began the final verse of Burns’ anthem a gesture from singer Sheen Wellington moved members from across Scotland’s political spectrum to join her in a rousing chorus. In that moment you would be forgiven for imagining that the fight against poverty and all its attendant injustices was being embedded into the very foundations of this infant parliament.

Indeed, words from that same song are quite literally engraved into the fabric of Holyrood, on the Canongate as a reminder to politicians coming down the Royal Mile to work. Yet, a quarter century on from that optimistic day and poverty persists in Scotland yet.

While the cross-party consensus on the importance of tackling poverty remains, you naturally won’t find a pro-poverty MSP, too often the actual action necessary to meaningfully fight poverty is lost in the argy-bargy of electoral politics.

A procession of First Ministers, including the incumbent John Swinney, have made eradicating poverty, child poverty particularly, a central pillar of their pitch to Scotland. It’s clear that there’s no route to eradicating poverty that doesn’t involve ending homelessness. Homelessness emerges from poverty, but homelessness also perpetuates poverty. It’s important to first acknowledge the work that’s been done by MSPs from across the political spectrum since 1999 in tackling homelessness and enhancing people’s housing rights.

The abolition of priority need, the right to temporary accommodation and for it to meet minimum standards, improved security for tenants in the private sector; these are all landmark moments for housing since devolution.

It is often said, not unreasonably, that Scotland has some of the best housing rights in Europe, a position we’ve arrived at since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament. However, when reflecting on a decade as Shelter Scotland Director spanning both the pre and post devolution era, Liz Nicholson said: “it’s legislation, and unless you’ve got the money behind it, for building houses and providing support services to people you’re not going to end the homelessness.” That’s the crux of where we find ourselves today, in the midst of a housing emergency and with homelessness once again on the rise. People’s housing rights are being breached almost as a matter of course, right across the country, because council homelessness services have been starved of funding for years and just can’t meet demand.

There’s no party in Holyrood that can absolve itself of responsibility for the current housing emergency which is fundamentally a result of decades of underinvestment in social housing. The right-to-buy policy, instigated in the 1980s, was of course a key factor in gutting the total social housing stock and pre-dates devolution. But since 1999, no Scottish Government has managed to deliver the social homes necessary to fill that void. Even when solid progress was being made it wasn’t enough, and the current administration slammed the breaks on at the exact moment we needed desperately to go faster.

The decisions made in Holyrood don’t exist in a vacuum of course, and much has been made of the need to mitigate the actions of the UK Government at Westminster. That’s argument is by no means entirely without merit. Well over a decade of austerity has forced people in Scotland into poverty, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to the worst consequences of the housing emergency. A key example is perhaps the bedroom tax and powerful reaction against it.

If a government wanted to concoct a platform that was carefully calibrated to force more people into poverty and homelessness, then they might very well come up with something like the bedroom tax. When combined with the rest of the benefit reforms implemented at the time the effect was devastating.

It was a major moment of divergence between the Scottish and UK Governments. Shelter Scotland’s ‘Banish the Bedroom Tax Monster’ campaign illustrated that divergence to an extent. Clearly the policy emanated from Westminster and so it was essential that some of our campaign efforts were directed there. The Scotland Secretary at the time received a visit from our giant purple personification of the Bedroom Tax, accompanied by our then Director Graeme Brown.



However, there was an awareness that even within the limits of devolution the Scottish Government wasn't completely powerless to address the situation and so the Bedroom Tax Monster, backed up by an army of Shelter Scotland campaigners, was dispatched to Holyrood as well.

The result of concerted and impassioned campaigning from ourselves and other housing and anti-poverty organisations was positive. By topping up discretionary housing payment funds, the Scottish Government gave councils the funding needed to ensure that tenants affected by the bedroom tax could be sure that the cost would be covered. A solution then, but a costly one, and one which illustrates the flash points between central and devolved administrations.

Mitigation could almost be said to define the devolution era approach to housing; good work has been done but the fundamental structural flaw which fuels the housing emergency remains unaddressed – the lack of social homes.

The shortage of social housing pushes people on low incomes into the private sector, which in turn drives up private rents and inflates housing prices. That makes housing ever more unaffordable, driving an increasing number of people into poverty and homelessness.

That's why there was a palpable sense of anger and dismay when, in the winter of 2023, the Scottish Government confirmed a second successive swinging cut to the Affordable Housing Supply Programme at a time of rising homelessness.

At Shelter Scotland we've repeatedly used the phrase 'social housing ends homelessness' and yes that's a simplification but it is fundamentally true. It's only social housing that can offer people experiencing poverty and homelessness the kind of affordability, security, and stability they need. That we all need.

You can't simply legislate homelessness away; it needs to be backed up by homes and the funding to deliver them. There's no way to end homelessness on the cheap.

Home really is everything. It's the foundation on which we build our lives, it's our very own port in the storm of life. Without it we become terribly vulnerable. The sad fact is there are almost 10,000 children in Scotland who don't have somewhere to call home; robbed in their formative years of that sense of comfort and certainty. How can ending that blatant injustice not be the priority of a government which says it is committed to ending child poverty?

This year the Scottish Parliament declared a housing emergency and while there was debate on the detail, the entire chamber acknowledged that the situation is grim. When the Scottish Parliament reaches its 50th anniversary it's possible that we could look back on that as a pivotal moment; but only if our politicians are willing to match words with action.

The housing emergency is the cumulative result of poor political choices made both before devolution and since. Politicians are quick to take credit when progress is made; that's understandable. It's fair then that they also shoulder responsibility when the opposite is true, and that having recognised the often-brutal reality of a broken housing system they are willing to take the steps necessary to fix it.

For some time now each new set of official homelessness statistics have painted an increasingly bleak picture. Behind each one of those figures is a person struggling, a life devastated by the trauma of homelessness. It took decades for us to reach this point where the housing system is so completely broken, we can't allow it to take decades to mend.



PUBLIC SERVICES 25 YEARS ON



*Lilian Macer is
Scottish Secretary of
Unison*

Devolution has been good for Scotland's public services, so it's been good for Scotland's people; but not as good as it could have been or as it needs to be.

Everyone in Scotland relies on public services; for fresh water, to empty our bins, ensure our food is safe, and our streets are lit. For all but a handful public services provide our healthcare and educate our children. All of us use and rely on our public services every day, but for those on low incomes public services can often be lifelines. Lifelines providing the support and stability that can allow them to look to build a life beyond poverty.

There are any number of developments that have been made, services over the years. To take one consistent theme throughout devolution – the attention to young children. From the acknowledgement that all children benefit from early years education and the slow but steady increase in provision of free childcare to the baby box and a variety of rights put into law. It's been public service workers – many of them in areas where UNISON organises that have been the ones putting these new policies or laws into effect. Often it should be said in circumstances where they are dealing with the gap between the political rhetoric and the budget provided.

As a trade union, it is natural that of the various way poverty manifests itself, it is the prevention of in work poverty that is at the forefront of our concerns. In this regard devolution has provided opportunities, but as in other areas, the full potential has yet to be achieved.

Since the setting up of the parliament, trade union action has ensured that those employed in the public sector receive, at least, the Scottish Living Wage. Since then, this has been extended to be mandatory for organisations receiving public sector grants and is strongly promoted (but not absolutely mandatory) in public procurement.

While the Living Wage in the public sector was the result of straightforward wage bargaining exercises, the extension to outsourced services has been part of the “Fair Work” agenda. Since 2016 we have had the Scottish Government endorsed framework for Fair Work. Fair work is defined as “work that provides opportunity, fulfilment, security, respect and effective voice. Fair work balances the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees and can generate benefits for individuals, organisations and for society”. These are of course fine principles, but ensuring that they are put into practice is a continuing piece of work. To take perhaps the most pressing example. The Scottish Government has a Fair Work in Social Care Group. This was set up after a report by the Fair Work convention by 2019, laid out the dire plight of those who deliver care, both care at home and in care homes. In addition to this there has been the STUC's Profiting from Care report. This showing pay was, on average less in the private sector. Sick pay too, beyond the statutory, was rare and maternity and paternity pay poor. Whilst the not-for-profit sector struggled to match the collectively bargained NHS and local authority terms and conditions.

Improving terms and conditions for this, large, growing, underpaid and (not coincidentally) female workforce is in itself an anti-poverty initiative. It's one of the disappointments of the fair work agenda that despite making the commitment years ago and much engagement from both trade unions and others, the Scottish Government have still not delivered sectoral bargaining for care sector. The relevance of advancing the Fair Work agenda goes far beyond the narrow interests of individual workers, or even their families. The Covid pandemic has shown that that Fair Work is a public health issue. Without the support of a recognised union; workers couldn't confidently raise health and safety concerns. In a pandemic, not having a voice at work can be deadly. The lowest paid workers have the highest levels of stress at work. Inequality and injustice at work goes hand in hand with workplace stress and poor mental health.

In doing this, incidentally, we are standing up for the quality of public services - staff who aren't continually worried about how they are going to pay their bills, or having to work two or three different jobs or excessively long hours just to keep their head above water - , are staff who are going to be able to put more into their work.

This concern for the quality of the work people are allowed to do or, in other words, the quality of the services they provide, is also something the Fair Work agenda should be advancing through it's “effective voice” strand.



The Scottish Government has a Fair Work in Social Care Group, but is it delivering?

Having effective voice means that all workers should be able to have a say in how work is organised and run. The ability to speak, individually and collectively, and to be listened to, is closely linked to the development of respectful and reciprocal workplace relationships.

Acknowledging the legitimacy of employee voice reflects the interests of employees, individually and collectively, in everything that an organisation does. Having an effective voice is critical to delivering the other dimensions of Fair Work. Effective voice through trade unions is associated with workforces gaining a range of benefits such as agreed working time and holiday arrangements, training provision, training duration, improved health and safety outcomes and access to flexible working. There are many examples in Scotland and elsewhere of how collective voice through trade unions working with employers has addressed a wide range of organisational challenges and contributed to organisational improvements.

Supporting resilient individuals in resilient communities takes not just good intentions or fine words. It also takes hard cash. It is here that there has been the most acute failure of devolution to meet its potential across. This isn't to say that there hasn't been investment in particular areas at differing times. However, there have also been cuts, or initiatives launched without adequate funding and across many areas a lot of the time, staff expected to deliver more for less.

The Scottish Government can point with some justice to the years following the financial crash when budget cuts were forced upon them. Even here, though, cuts were disproportionately applied to some areas while others were protected. In particular, local government received greater

percentage cuts than the Scottish Government as the main brake on services failing to deliver all they could though hasn't been an externally imposed austerity – it's been and internally adopted lack of ambition.

The Scottish Parliament was set up with tax varying powers. Since then there have been two further extensions of the financial powers available to the Scottish Government. Yet use of them has been minimal. Arguably Holyrood has been more concerned with reducing the amount of money coming into public services than raising it. The Scottish Government made local authorities freeze council tax for almost a decade and claimed they had fully funded the measure, they never explained which budget went short to pay for it. Similarly back in his Finance Secretary days, no budget speech from John Swinney was complete without a boast of Scotland having the “lowest business taxes in these islands”. A declaration repeated (often word for word) by all his successors in the post.

Now we have, welcome enough but small, efforts at raising revenue through the top rate of income tax. These don't go nearly far enough. To use an analogy from our underfunded NHS - they are first aid, not a course of treatment.

Amongst options open to the Scottish Government a re increasing land and building transaction tax, increasing the additional dwelling supplement, lowering the threshold for higher rate income tax, local inheritance taxes, increasing landfill tax and the long overdue replacement of the Council Tax with a more workable tax on property.

Showing a level of ambition here would substantially advance the Community Wealth building and Wellbeing economy ideas that the Scottish Government say they support but do little to advance.

Building a Fair Work nation will become easier if public services are properly funded, as improved terms and conditions in public services will mean other employers will make efforts to compete. In addition they would allow our services to shift effort from dealing with problems into their prevention – which would be better for everyone.



GENDER BUDGETING AND THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE



Sara Cowan is Co-ordinator of the Scottish Women's Budget Group

Reflecting on the way gender budgeting has developed in the Scottish Parliament's history is a reflection on our history as an organisation. The Scottish Women's Budget Group (SWBG) was born with the hope that Scotland's own parliament could progress gender equality through a whole manner of policy initiatives including through gender analysis of public spending and revenue raising policies. With the coming of devolution an opportunity was spotted, and hopes were high.

Feminist organisers and academics including (but not limited to) Fiona Forsyth, Ailsa MacKay and Angela O'Hagan, came together to consider how this concept could work in Scotland. Through their deliberations the Scottish Women's Budget Group was founded and for much of our history has been a voluntary group of women spending their time analysing Scotland's budgets and advocating for change.

With optimism our founders and early members built understanding of what gender budgeting is and developed the argument of why it is needed in Scotland. They took this understanding to the new Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), officials and Committee enquiries. The creation of the Scottish Parliament provided a new space to make change happen.

At its heart gender budgeting is part of the feminist toolkit to build gender equality in Scotland. It is a process of analysis that seeks to bring the different economic realities of women and men to the heart of decision making. Within this recognising the differing experiences of women that intersect with the gender analysis, such as age, socioeconomic status, disability, race, ethnicity, religion and rural or urban location.

From the feminist economic perspective, a critical element of gender budget analysis and its aim for transformative change across economic policy is recognising the central role of care to our economy.¹⁵ Marilyn Waring, a New Zealand public scholar, parliamentarian and principal founder of feminist economics, demonstrated in her book *If Women Counted* how unpaid care and the value of nature were not included in the system of national accounts, which measures economic growth.¹⁶ This (deliberate?) exclusion facilitates women's discrimination, contributing to the undervaluation of care. Recognising care work is therefore a vital step in building a gender equal economy, and budgets play a key role in achieving this.

Pregs Govender a South African parliamentarian in the first post-apartheid parliament highlighted the importance of having a national budget that reflects 'the values of a country – who it values, whose work it values and who it rewards ... and who and what and whose work it doesn't.'¹⁷ We agree that ultimately, budgets are about choices, and, at the Scottish Women's Budget Group we argue that these choices can help us tackle gender inequalities.

25 years on

The story across the 25 years fluctuates from optimism to frustration as warm words and support from government and parliamentarians have so far failed to produce the transformational change we long to see. But there have been steps towards progress and these should not be diminished. From the early days of the Parliament in 2000, a Budget Advisory Group focusing on equalities has existed in various iterations to build processes, systems and commitment within the Scottish Government to deliver equalities analysis within the Scottish Budget.¹⁸ Now formed as the Equalities and Human Rights Budget Advisory Group and consisting of Mainstreaming Equalities, Finance and Exchequer officials as well as external members including SWBG, the Scottish Human Rights Commission and Audit Scotland. This group continues to build energy for delivery of equalities and human rights considerations, including specific pilot projects on gender budgeting that have recently been undertaken.

In addition, at points throughout the Scottish Parliaments history, we have seen the adoption of positive language on the need to invest in care and this turn into concrete policy action.

¹⁵ Himmelweit, Susan and Plomien, Ania (2014) Feminist perspectives on care: theory, practice and policy in *The Sage Handbook of Feminist Theory*

¹⁶ Waring, M. (1990) *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*

¹⁷ Budlender, D. (1996), *The Women's Budget*

¹⁸ O'Hagan, A. (2024) Gender Budgeting in Scotland since Devolution in *Scottish Affairs* 33.1 (2024)



GENDER BUDGETING AND THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST AND HOPES FOR THE FUTURE



“The National Advisory Council for Women and Girls, set up by then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, has made repeated calls for the implementation of gender budgeting and for it to be placed on a statutory footing.”

Most notable when making the case to extend funded childcare provision the Scottish Government included the narrative for the economic case for investing in childcare, resting on the work and advocacy of Ailsa McKay and colleagues at Glasgow Caledonian University. However, most of the time it has been incremental steps with more limited implementation.

The existence of the Equalities and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement is another sign of progress. It is an important statement of intent to recognise the role of the budget in tackling inequalities. Although this remains a work in progress and has been developing since its creation it needs to be used as a basis for decision making rather than merely setting out aspirations. The lack of information within this statement may be a symptom of the time, resources and capacity to ensure quality analysis is undertaken. In our analysis of last year’s budget documents we welcomed the fact that Ministers met for the first time to consider the impacts of budget decisions on tackling inequality but felt there was a failure to show ‘their workings’ or assessments in the budgetary papers.

Alongside this, we are concerned that the focus on equalities more generally waters down specific efforts to tackle gender inequality. Angela O’Hagan highlights that a wider equalities frame has been a concern for a number of years in her recent article Gender Budgeting in Scotland Since Devolution writing that “feminists have been uneasy that the gendered nature of social and economic relations is undermined by a poorly executed collective approach to addressing persistent forms of discrimination.”¹⁹

The calls to embed gender budgeting are being made across feminist organisations in Scotland including Engender, Scottish Women’s Aid, and Close the Gap. Recognising the fundamental role gender budgeting can play in addressing both the cause and consequences of gender inequality. Over the last eight years the National Advisory Council for Women and Girls (NACWG), set up by then First Minister Nicola Sturgeon, has made repeated calls for the implementation of gender budgeting and for it to be placed on a statutory footing.²⁰ The NACWG is now working to review how its recommendations have been acted upon and for Government to step up the pace on implementation.

19 O’Hagan, A. (2024) Gender Budgeting in Scotland since Devolution in Scottish Affairs 33.1 (2024)

20 National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (2021) Next Steps Report



“From the early days of the Parliament in 2000, a Budget Advisory Group focusing on equalities has existed in various iterations...”



However, the Scottish Government’s response so far in the reviewing the Public Sector Equality Duty has been a missed opportunity to implement recommendations relating to gender budgeting.

New areas of focus

Over the last four years SWBG has moved to become a registered charity in Scotland and receives funding from multiple sources, including the Scottish Government to carry out our work of analysis, advocacy, research and training on gender budget analysis. Through this, we have worked with women’s groups across the country to understand how the tools of gender budgeting can make a difference to their lives.

In East Lothian working with the Fa’side Women and Girls Group and Making Rights Real the group has made the case for change to East Lothian Council and the need to include gender analysis in their anti-poverty strategy. In Glasgow, working with the women’s group of the Glasgow Disability Alliance we have highlighted the effect that charges for non-residential social care are having on disabled households, questioning whether this policy has given consideration to how households with children are being affected despite them being identified as a priority group in relation to addressing child poverty.

Delivery of gender budgeting at the Scottish Government has never been the only goal for SWBG. We want to see the Scottish Government leading by example in the implementation of gender budget analysis of the Scottish Budget and for public authorities, particularly Local Authorities, to incorporate this analysis in their budget setting. This will ensure that public spending decisions made on significant budget spend outside the Scottish Government are also working to build gender equality.

Reflecting on the Scottish Parliament at 25 needs to act as a reminder to government, parliamentarians and officials of how long the calls for gender budget analysis have been made in the corridors of Holyrood, of the support these calls have received yet the incremental level of change that has been made. When it comes to reflecting on 30 years of the Scottish Parliament, we hope to be marking more substantive change in how budget decisions are made and the impact they have on tackling inequalities. That’s the challenge for the next 5 years and the case we will be continuing to make.

This article is informed by a longer reflection written by Angela O’Hagan on Gender Budgeting in Scotland since Devolution in Scottish Affairs 33.1 (2024)



OUR PARLIAMENT MUST DELIVER: PEOPLE'S LIVES DEPEND ON IT



Derek Mitchell is Chief Executive Officer of Citizens Advice Scotland

If you talk to any of the staff at each of our 59 Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) across Scotland, I'm confident they'd tell you the same thing: they have never been busier, and things have never been more difficult for the people in their communities. People don't have enough money to afford the essentials we all need. And while the breadth and depth of advice straddles many different issues, the root challenge for far too many of the households we're supporting right now is poverty. Advisers repeatedly report the desperation in people's faces as they say, 'I never thought this would happen to me'.

Both my parents grew up in poverty. It was drummed into me as a boy the value of money and how to make ends meet. In my working life, I've worked as a practitioner then policy maker in housing, homelessness and social work. During this time, I saw up close how poverty wrecks lives and kills a person's hope.

It's brought me face to face with that reality – but also with the reality that poverty is not inevitable; that there are levers that government can use to not only mitigate but eradicate it.

I remember the palpable sense of optimism and excitement on the day the Scottish Parliament came into being. Amid the drummers and street-singers and those who lined the streets to welcome the 129 newly elected MSPs, the view was that Scotland's long-renowned lean towards social justice could now be put into action. There was a chance to really make a difference to people's lives. Throughout this time some progress has been made, but the reality is that things are as bad for many people now as they were for my parents when they were young.

Each month over 23,000 people seek advice from the CAB network, with advice about benefits representing half of that. It's consistently our biggest area of advice. Over the last three months, over 10,000 people received support with Universal Credit alone. Increasing financial gain has always been a key priority for us, with £142 million secured in 2022-2023 for our clients.

When reflecting on what the Parliament has achieved over the last 25 years to tackle poverty, for us at CAS, we should focus on social security.

In the eight years in which devolved powers have been operational for social security, something transformative has happened. A public service agency has been built on values, with the explicit objective of treating Scotland's people with dignity, fairness and respect. It has a presence in local communities, bringing social security to people, delivering payments that are recognised in law as an investment in the people of Scotland.

Framed by a human rights and poverty alleviation approach, several new benefits have been introduced. Commitment has been shown to unpaid carers, through increased financial support via the Carer's Allowance Supplement and the Young Carer's Grant, and extra payments to carers of more than one disabled child. The Scottish Child payment and the Best Start grants very much target child poverty, with a cash first approach.

A new system of health and disability costs support is beginning to mature: Adult Disability Payment (ADP). Gone in Scotland is the infamous assessment and devastating reports which people felt it to be intrusive, stigmatising and inaccurate. In its place: applicant choice over how to provide information to support their claim, and a recognition of the value of a whole person approach to understanding need; with informal carers acknowledged to have some of the deepest insights.

Overall, these changes are progressive, delivering more money to low-income families and our data is beginning to reveal impact. The proportion of households with children receiving food insecurity advice from a CAB decreased by 10% over February to March in 2023-2024. In the same period the previous year, it increased by 29%. This shift coincides with the expansion of Scottish Child Payment.

It's a great beginning, but the story is far from over. Evidence from our network shows ADP may not be reaching everyone who would need it. Accessing it remains complex and the journey can be protracted, putting people at risk of the trauma of "re-telling". Challenges remain to achieving high quality, accurate decisions at initial application stage.



The Scottish Citizens Advice Network has a unique lens into people's lives. People arrive looking for help with one thing and leave with advice across multiple areas. Housing, energy, crisis support. Our approach has always been to offer a holistic service to deliver the best outcomes. These interconnected issues require interconnected solutions to improve people's lives.

Undoubtedly, we've seen policy interventions across several areas that have contributed to tackling poverty; free prescriptions, tuition fees, school meals and bus travel for the under 22s, over 60s and disabled people, alongside an increased rights-based approach and the most progressive homelessness rights in the world.

The approaches taken have rightly included both universality and targeted measures. One of the most compounding elements of poverty is the enduring stigma and shame that people feel, all too often perpetuated by the media. Stigma holds people hostage, preventing them from accessing the payments and support that they are entitled to for fear of neighbours, friends knowing you're getting help from 'the social'. A CAB in Central Scotland has recently been working with a disabled couple in need of financial support, initially deeply reluctant to apply for fear as being perceived as 'lazy fraudsters, like they show you on the TV'.

Giving everyone access to some key services has played an important role in both guaranteeing uptake and improving people's lives. But at the same time, it's been right that with finite resources a targeted approach to support those who need it most has worked in parallel, like school clothing grants.

The last five years have not only been exceptionally challenging for all of us and most importantly for the people CABs support, but for the Parliament too. A global pandemic, war in Ukraine, energy and cost of living crisis. During times of crisis, we know people already struggling experience the most hardship. Recent events have sought to entrench existing inequalities as we have witnessed food bank usage skyrocket and priority debts for rents and council tax arrears soar. We were never 'all in the same boat' to face these storms.

While poverty levels in general have decreased over the last 25 years and more recently plateaued, we must not ignore the experiences of key groups. Poverty rates have worsened for disabled people in Scotland, with half (51%) of all people in poverty living in a household with at least one disabled member.



OUR PARLIAMENT MUST DELIVER: PEOPLE'S LIVES DEPEND ON IT

Scotland's Citizens Advice Network is an essential community service that empowers people through our local bureaux and national services by providing free, confidential and independent advice.

We use people's real-life experiences to influence policy and drive positive change. We are on the side of people in Scotland who need help and we change lives for the better.

For those seeking advice on ADP from our CABs, almost 60% live in the most deprived communities, reinforcing the long-demonstrated relationship between disability and poverty.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the Scottish Parliament right now is to urgently support those who are cold, hungry and homeless across our nation. Yet at the same time work is needed to deliver the long-term solutions that are needed to transform people's lives and lift them out of poverty permanently. The time for sticking plasters has long expired. We need open heart surgery to bring about the systems change that will truly make a difference. Our ambition must remain high.

One of those ambitions must include the delivery of the minimum income guarantee (MIG). The MIG is a simple, yet highly transformative initiative, ensuring everyone can live a decent, dignified, healthy and financially stable life. Based around policy interventions to work, social security and essential services, it would provide adequate income, tailored to the needs of a household, to guarantee the stability needed for people to realise their potential. Guarantees, not conditionality, is the change we need to see. In a just and compassionate Scotland, our collective aspiration must be for everyone to have enough.

Poverty costs all of us. First and foremost, it has a devastating impact on those who experience it. The relationship between poverty and trauma is clear, robbing people of their potential and often directing the course of their lives. It affects people's physical and mental wellbeing, removing them from the labour market, increasing demand for the NHS and other services. We cannot afford not to do more. It also costs our advisers. The effects of vicarious trauma are real as staff repeatedly encounter those who are enduring the most harrowing of circumstances, including people considering suicide. We need ongoing investment and sustainable funding for the advice sector to enable the collegiate approach that is required to tackle poverty.

As we mark the 25th anniversary of the Scottish Parliament, it's right to take stock of the difference that has been made to tackling poverty in Scotland, celebrate some successes. Yet equally, we must bring into laser sharp focus the work we still have to do. It's impossible to know what the next 25 years will hold, but we can and must do better. And urgently. While ambition to tackle poverty is visible across the Scottish Parliament, action must deliver outcomes. People's lives are depending on it.



'A MAN'S A MAN'



On 1 July 1999, Scottish folk singing legend Sheena Wellington sang 'A Man's a Man' at the opening of the Scottish Parliament. The song was written in 1795 by Robert Burns, and expresses his hopes for a future Scotland - and a future world - based on equality and solidarity.





'A MAN'S A MAN'



"The anti-poll tax movement... was a clear lesson in the role of organised communities challenging unjust decisions"

Is there for honest Poverty
That hings his head, an' a' that;
The coward-slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that.
Our toils obscure an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The Man's the gowd for a' that.

What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey, an' a' that;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine;
A Man's a Man for a' that:
For a' that, and a' that,
Their tinsel show, an' a' that;
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.

Ye see yon birkie ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that,
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that.

For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that,
The man o' independent mind,
He looks an' laughs at a' that.
A Prince can mak a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, an' a' that!
But an honest man's aboon his might –
Guid faith, he mauna fa' that!

Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth
Shall bear the gree an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
It's comin yet for a' that,
That Man to Man the warld o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that.

For a' that, an' a' that,
Their dignities, an' a' that,
The pith o' Sense an' pride o' Worth
Are higher rank than a' that.





MEMBERSHIP:

JOIN US!

The Poverty Alliance is a national anti-poverty development agency for Scotland, which seeks to combat poverty through collaborative action, bringing together workers and activists drawn from the public sector, voluntary organisations, community groups and other agencies.

The benefits of membership include regular mailings, Scottish Anti-Poverty Review, opportunities to become involved in working groups and access to a wide range of organisations and activists who have the potential to influence the direction of anti-poverty policy in the future.

The Alliance's wide range of activities provide many opportunities for members to exchange information and expertise, which benefits the anti-poverty movement.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name and designation of contact person: _____

Name and address of organisation: _____

Telephone: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

MEMBERSHIP FEES:

FULL MEMBERSHIP: OPEN TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: INCOME LESS THAN £50K: FREE | £50,000-£75,000: £50 | £75,000-£175,000: £75 | £175,000-£500,000: £100 | MORE THAN £500,000: £200

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP: OPEN TO INDIVIDUALS, VOLUNTARY AND STATUTORY BODIES, AND PRIVATE SECTOR ORGANISATIONS*: UNWAGED INDIVIDUALS: FREE | INDIVIDUALS: £25 | VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS: £25 | STATUTORY BODIES: £300

*PLEASE CONTACT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE FOR DETAILS

I/We wish to apply for *Ordinary/Associate Membership for the year: _____

* Please delete as appropriate. NB Membership of The Poverty Alliance runs from 1st April to 31st March. Applications for new membership received after April 1st are charged on a pro rata basis.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please send the completed application form to the address below - thank you.

The Poverty Alliance, Standard Buildings, 94 Hope Street, Glasgow G2 6PH
T: 0141 353 0440 | E: admin@povertyalliance.org | www.povertyalliance.org