

SNP false claims over WASPI exposed

Over 2.5 million women born in the 1950s have had their state pension age changed without fair notification, leaving many in poverty. Scottish Labour believes these women deserve both recognition for the injustice they have suffered, and compensation for their losses. Around 253,000 Scottish women have been affected by this change, as highlighted by the Women Against State Pension Inequality (WASPI) campaign.

In February this year, Jeane Freeman, the SNP social security minister, told the Scottish Parliament that the Scottish Government could not provide assistance to WASPI women. The image below is what Ms Freeman said in the chamber:

To Jackie Baillie, I say that I am not prepared to let the Tory Government off the hook but, even if I was, section 28 of the [Scotland Act 2016](#), on exceptions to reserved areas, says that top-up does not include pensions assistance or assistance

However, a Freedom of Information request to the Department for Work and Pensions reveals this to be false. The image below is from a letter to Jeane Freeman from the UK Government Pensions Minister.

The substantial new welfare powers that the Scottish Parliament has provides you with options to support people affected by changes to the State Pension, including supporting women affected by increases in State Pension age, should you so wish. Of course, this is entirely a matter for the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament to decide.

One such option, however, could be for you to legislate to introduce new discretionary payments using section 26 the Scotland Act 2016 (exception 7 to Section F1 of Schedule 5 to the Scotland Act 1998). This power was introduced to give you the widest possible scope to help meet the short-term needs of people in Scotland, which could include those who are affected by changes to the State Pension. In respect of which, there is no prescribed definition of 'short-term', and this will be substantially for the Scottish Parliament to determine.

Ahead of the 2016 Holyrood election, Labour campaigned to use the social security powers of the Scottish Parliament to support some of the WASPI women

LABOUR WILL USE THE POWERS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

FOR THE MANY NOT THE FEW

Scottish Labour

Now, our economy spokesperson Jackie Baillie MSP has written to Jeane Freeman asking for her to apologise and act to help the WASPI Women. The contents of the letter are below.

Dear Jeane,

Discretionary payments under Section 26 of the Scotland Act

I am writing following the publication of the Freedom of Information requests which prove that the Scottish Government has the powers to provide financial assistance to the WASPI women.

As you will be aware, thousands of women born in the 1950s have been left facing real financial difficulty because of the lack of notice given by the Tory government about changes to the state pension.

Ahead of the 2016 Holyrood election Labour campaigned to use the social security powers of the Scottish Parliament to support some of the WASPI women who were losing out because of the Tories.

You have repeatedly stated, including to parliament in February, that the provisions in the Scotland Act do not allow for assistance for the WASPI women.

It has now been proven beyond doubt that this is simply not the case. I am writing to you today urging you to apologise for misleading the Scottish Parliament and, more importantly, the WASPI women over the powers of the Scottish Government in this area.

The new powers delivered by the 2016 Scotland Act should be an opportunity to deliver radical policies in Scotland – instead of simply pursuing another

grievance agenda with the UK government. You have the power to act. The question therefore, is not whether you can, but whether you will?

A public apology on this will be an important statement that this government will finally focus on embracing the new powers rather than misrepresenting them.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Baillie MSP

SNP's welfare powers delay will punish 130,000 disabled Scots

The state of play

Nearly 130,000 disabled Scots could be forced to go through cruel Tory assessments because the SNP has delayed the transfer of social security powers to Holyrood.

More than 128,000 working-age Scots currently in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) are due to be assessed for the new Personal Independence Payments (PIP).

These cruel assessments have stripped benefits from disabled people across the UK.

We can do things differently

The Scottish Government now has wide ranging powers over social security thanks to the 2016 Scotland Act – the post-referendum Vow delivered in full. It's an opportunity to build a social security system that is there for all of us in our time of need.

It means that these assessments can be scrapped in Scotland.

SNP ministers are dragging their heels

But since then it has emerged that the SNP government has asked the UK Tory government to retain control over certain benefits until 2020, effectively delaying the full transfer of welfare powers.

That means tens of thousands Scots still face an assessment under the current system.

Scottish Labour will strengthen the social security safety net

LABOUR WILL USE THE POWERS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

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Scottish Labour has more radical plans than any other party for social security, such as:

- Halting the roll-out of Universal Credit
- Kicking the private sector out of the welfare system
- Increasing Child Benefit by £240 a year by 2020
- Increasing the take-up of tax credits and housing benefit to ensure everyone gets what they are entitled to

Click the image below to learn more about our summer campaign For The Many



Tory benefits cap is an attack on single parents

In 2015, Labour MPs tabled amendments to exempt lone parents with young children from the Tories' benefits cap. The Conservatives refused to listen.

That cruel decision means thousands of families have been pushed into poverty as a result. Today, we can reveal the huge impact this has had.

Official analysis shows that two-thirds of capped claimants in Scotland are single parents – nearly all single mothers. That means of the 3,642 capped households in Scotland, 2,397 were single parents with at least one child dependant.

Proportion of capped claimants:	
Single, no children	10.10%
Couple, no children	0.25%
Lone parent	65.82%
Couple with children	24.05%

Gender of capped lone parents:	
Male	2.75%
Female	95.99%
Unknown	1.29%

As we repeatedly warned, the impact of this and the Tories' other social security cuts is pushing more children into poverty, punishing them for their parents' circumstances.

The Tory cap places an annual limit on the total amount of benefit that working-age households can claim. The Welfare Reform and Work Act 2015 reduced the cap from £26,000 to £20,000.

The UK Government's Impact Assessment estimates that up to 5,000 Scottish households could be affected by the cap, and the average reduction in benefit entitlement is estimated to be around £60 per week.

A High Court judgement on June 22 this year ruled that the benefit cap is unlawful and illegally discriminates against single parents with young children under the age of two.

The UK Government must listen to the High Court's judgement that this policy is discriminatory and unlawful, marking another blow in its failing austerity agenda.

A Labour government would examine ways to remove the £20,000 limit as part of plans to reform and redesign Universal Credit, which would also include ending six-week delays in payment and abolishing the 'rape clause'.

A Labour government will transform the social security system so that, like the NHS, it is there for us all in our time of need.

Scottish Labour's summer campaign, For The Many, is this week focusing on tackling inequality. Read more about our campaign by clicking on the image below:



[Tories must halt Universal Credit roll-out](#)

TORIES MUST HALT UNIVERSAL CREDIT ROLL-OUT

Scottish Labour deputy leader Alex Rowley has today demanded that Tory plans to roll-out Universal Credit are halted. Alex has written to Conservative Work and Pensions Secretary David Gauke, amid growing concerns that families are being pushed into poverty and debt. He has also challenged Scottish

Conservative leader Ruth Davidson to get behind our campaign.



Universal Credit, which will replace six existing benefits, is supposed to make access to social security payments less complicated. It has been rolled out in parts of Scotland and is due to be introduced in full across the country by the end of 2018 – starting this October. But there are particular concerns about the six-week waiting period for payments at the start of the process.

Since Universal Credit was introduced, Citizens Advice Scotland evidence in initial roll-out areas shows:

- A 15 per cent rise in rent arrears issues compared to a national decrease of 2 per cent.
- An 87 per cent increase in Crisis Grant issues compared to a national increase of 9 per cent.
- Two of five bureaux in impacted areas have seen a 40 per cent and a 70 per cent increase in advice about access to food banks advice, compared to a national increase of 3 per cent.

A Labour government would act immediately to end the worst excesses of the Tory government's changes, and would rebuild and transform our social security system.

Scottish Labour's summer campaign, For The Many, will this week focus on tackling inequality. You can read more about the campaign [here](#)

Read Alex's letter to David Gauke MP in full:

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you regarding the accelerated roll-out of Universal Credit. I have been in contact with organisations in my area, and have met with many constituents at local job clubs and heard first-hand some of the issues around the roll-out of Universal Credit. There is a very real concern that the system as it is operating is leaving many in poverty and debt.

The intention behind Universal Credit is supposedly to make access to social security less complex, and to further support people into work. This cannot be the case if it is leaving people without the vital support they need and drives some to have to rely on foodbanks simply to survive.

Of particular concern is the six week waiting period for payments at the start of the process. This is resulting in people ending up with rent arrears, increased reliance on crisis grants and relying on foodbanks for the very basic necessity of feeding themselves. The evidence to show all of this is now available from the pilot roll out areas as highlighted by Citizens

Advice Scotland in a recent publication.

People have also reported that they are finding the process particularly complicated, which is resulting in more time spent ensuring that the bureaucratic process has been followed to avoid sanctioning, and less time actually available to look for work, or to develop the skills needed for work. There are also serious problems with individuals struggling to manage their claims online due to lacking digital skills or access to a computer. It is for these reasons that I am asking that the accelerated roll-out of Universal Credit be halted until these problems can be resolved. If the system as it is operating puts more people in poverty or debt, or even increases the risk of these, then it should not continue in that form. Universal Credit must operate in a manner that helps individuals who need that support. Surely it cannot be right or acceptable that it hurts the very people it is designed to help.

Any changes to social security must be designed and implemented to support those individuals who rely on it. It can't simply be a rigid administrative process, it must look beyond the process itself and see what impact it is having for the lives of those that use it. With this roll-out of Universal Credit we are seeing the impact it is having on people's lives, and it is raising serious concerns.

I look forward to your response on how the DWP intend to resolve these worrying problems and I do hope in the meantime you will delay the roll out until assurances are in place that these concerns which are driving people into poverty are resolved.

Yours sincerely,
Alex Rowley MSP

[Labour's plan to boost school leaver opportunities](#)

OUR PLAN TO BOOST SCHOOL LEAVER OPPORTUNITIES

We want to improve opportunities for Scotland's young people.

They must be equipped with the skills they need to compete for the jobs of tomorrow.

That's why Labour is the only party opposed to Tory and SNP austerity. We would invest in Scotland's education system.



But we can only design policies to improve outcomes for young people once they've left school if they are based on better quality information. That's why we are today proposing an overhaul of the way that outcomes for 16-to-19 year olds are measured.

The Scottish Government's current 'positive destination' criteria is no longer fit for purpose.

For example, the current methodology used by the SNP considers a school leaver who ends up on a zero-hours contract to be in a 'positive destination'.

There's nothing positive about the rise in zero-hours contracts, yet that's how they are classified by the SNP.

The methodology also takes no account of insecure or temporary employment, or retention in education courses, because it fails to track the progress, or otherwise, of youngsters over a number of years – despite the current volatility of the employment market.

The number of people in insecure work in Scotland has increased by nearly a third since 2011 under the SNP.

So here's what we would do differently:

- Reintroduce the "longitudinal" approach of the previous Labour/LibDem Scottish Executive's Scottish School Leavers Survey, scrapped by the SNP, which tracked the progress of youngsters over several years.
- Remove zero hour contracts as a 'positive destination' for youngsters.
- Widen the methodology to include all 16-to-19 year olds.

A UK Labour government would ban zero hour contracts.



And we would introduce a £10-an-hour Real Living Wage.



If SNP ministers are serious about improving life chances for the next generation, they have to get serious about facing up to how well, or how badly, their policies are working.

It's time for a major overhaul. SNP ministers have been too distracted to focus on the day job and too ready to believe their own 'spin', so Labour is doing their job for them and putting forward a proposal that would transform the way we measure success.

The measures would tie in with our industrial strategy, unveiled earlier this summer.

We would:

- Invest in education to address skills shortages – particularly in Science,

Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and coding – so our young people have the skills they need to compete for the jobs of tomorrow.

- Commit to full employment with a focus on the industries and jobs of the future – including decommissioning and renewables, alongside the FinTech [Financial Technology] sector.
- Ensure public procurement doesn't reward companies and organisations that engage in blacklisting, operate zero-hours contracts, pay below Living Wage levels and other unfair employment practices.

You can read more about our industrial strategy [here](#):



Our proposals are part of our summer campaign, For The Many. As well as our industrial strategy, we have also launched a commission to address the staffing crisis in our NHS and a five-point plan to tackle poverty. Read more about our campaign [here](#)

