

Work Pensions and Equality

Summary of Consultation Responses

Gaps in the system:

There has been significant growth in claimant numbers due to the pandemic. Overwhelming evidence received by the Commission on failures in Universal Credit provision, such as concerns about maternity allowance, the 5 week wait, the benefit cap and savings limit all push people into crisis. Clear gaps in provision for carers, disabled people and single parents were noted.

UC has been a poor replacement for lost earnings during the pandemic. There is a genuine risk that the jobs crisis will rapidly become a living standards crisis. UC needs to be more generous long-term as more people are out of work for longer.

Labour is committed to replacing UC with a fairer and more equal alternative, awarded in a more timely way and preventing a drop in living standards.

Public perceptions:

As people who have not claimed UC prior to the pandemic are now claiming, they are gaining a better understanding of the inadequacy of the benefit.

The reputation of UC is generally seen as negative. The role of sanctions, conditionality and means testing add to the stigma of claiming. The punitive nature of the system must be brought to an end.

The importance of re-training and upskilling as a key to building a more resilient work force was highlighted. Job Centres should provide better access to training opportunities. A future SS system under Labour would work closely with other public services to support people back into work through training and education.

Access to the System:

The crisis has shown that anyone may have to claim benefit at some time in their lives. When the Job Retention Scheme ends in 2020, many new claimants will come forward. Many are shut out of the system under No Recourse To Public Funds status rules, even though they have a legal right to be here and are working and paying tax.

The online system and complexity of the application forms add to the inaccessibility problems for many. Consultation with groups who are impacted by difficulties of access is vital to the planning of a new system.

Disability benefits and the system of application and assessment mitigate against the ability of people to work towards more independent lives. They are administered by people who do not necessarily understand how disability affects lives.

Self-employment:

In considering the future of SS, it is important to look at changes in the labour market and how these would impact SS. Self-employed work has increased but the SS system does not support with sufficient flexibility. Statutory Sick Pay should be updated to provide support for the self-employed. A recent TUC report highlighted that 2million people were ineligible for SSP as their income did not meet the lower earnings limit. The low rate of sick pay is not enough to live on.

Tackling poverty and inequalities:

Structural inequalities affecting BAME people, disabled people, women and lone parents, (mostly women) and young people have been significantly impacted during the pandemic. 70% of those ineligible for SSP were women on low pay. Tackling inequalities is a responsibility of all government departments.

Submissions made it clear that SS should **not** subsidise low wages. Instead there must be a long-term strategy on jobs and workers' rights forcing employers to pay decent wages and provide secure work.

Concluding Remarks:

We must work over this election cycle to shape a SS system which accords with the principles in this report.