

SCOTTISH ANTI POVERTY REVIEW



ISSUE 35 SUMMER 2021



ROAD TO RECOVERY:
SHAPING POST-COVID SCOTLAND



EDITORIAL TEAM

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The Poverty Alliance

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ABOUT THE POVERTY ALLIANCE

The Poverty Alliance is a network of community, voluntary, statutory and other organisations whose vision is of a sustainable Scotland based on social and economic justice, with dignity for all, where poverty and inequalities are not tolerated and are challenged.

Our aim is to combat poverty by working with others to empower individuals and communities to affect change in the distribution of power and resources. To do this we:

- Work with people and communities experiencing poverty to empower them to address poverty
- Work with organisations to build a strong anti-poverty network in Scotland
- Support the development of policies which promote social justice and combat poverty
- Raise awareness about poverty and encourage debate

The Poverty Alliance is recognised as a charity by the Inland Revenue. Reference No: SCO19926

ISSN 1747-986X

WELCOME

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EDITORIAL

After almost 18 months of restrictions, frustration, and grief, many of us share a sense of optimism about the reopening of society. Thanks to the incredible work of scientists and researchers, the vaccines offer a chance once again to hug loved ones, see friends, and finally spend time together off-screen. However, for many of us in Scotland, the reopening of society offers a new period of uncertainty. Policies which helped keep families afloat during the pandemic are now being deemed by those in charge as unnecessary despite the threat of unemployment, illness, and financial insecurity. The looming end of furlough, the £20 cut to Universal Credit, and the still increasing levels of child poverty, raise important questions about what our new Members of Scottish Parliament must do to protect people from being swept into poverty.

This edition of the Scottish Anti-Poverty Review is published in the aftermath of the 2021 Scottish election. Whilst we may feel thankful for the end of the eternal stream of election leaflets through our doors, we should now be curious to see how manifesto commitments are kept. Both Kirsteen Paterson of The National and Chris Birt (Scotland Deputy Director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation), draw attention to the urgent need to tackle child poverty in Scotland. One such policy which could reduce child poverty by as much as 4% and received rare cross-party support is the doubling of the Scottish Child Payment (SCP) to £20 per child, per week. Doubling the SCP could lift tens of thousands of children out of poverty however, the imminent £20 cut to Universal Credit by the UK Government threatens to limit the significant impact this could have for thousands of families.

As we know, poverty is not solely related to income and the role of services in preventing or mitigating poverty is vital. Commissioned by Transport Scotland, the Poverty Alliance's Dr Laura Robertson writes that families and young people are being priced out of accessing public transport, preventing many young people and low-income families from accessing work, education and training, and social connection. On a similar note, the educational experience of children from low-income families has been drastically impacted during the pandemic, whether due to no access to mental health provisions, restricted ability to engage in the arts, or digital exclusion.

Securing an adequate income will be a central challenge

for MSP but ensuring access to decent services will also be critical in combating poverty over the next five years.

We know that the effects of the pandemic have exacerbated already existing inequalities. As Eilidh Dickson from Engender explains, the government's failings to consider the gendered divisions in paid and unpaid work, heightened expectations to perform unpaid labour in the home to support home-schooling and provide unpaid care to elderly and disabled relatives may have set back women's rights by as much as 25 years. As Dickson states, the recovery from the pandemic is far from over, and all decisions made from here on out must be made with the aims to eradicate poverty, discrimination, and the impact of outdated gender norms.

This new Scottish Parliament now contains 129 MSP's possessing the power to create a radical and just Scotland where we can tackle both the social and climate crisis and unlock people from the grip of poverty. The debates that took place during the election campaign showed a welcome sense of shared purpose and commitment around the need to tackle poverty. There are exciting and potentially transformative policy proposals on the table. With ideas such as the Minimum Income Guarantee, Universal Basic Services, Community Wealth Building, not to mention a national care service and the implementation of Adult Disability Payment, MSPs are spoilt for choice when it comes to ideas to genuinely building back better. We now need a sustained period of action and implementation; we need to turn bold commitments and warm words into real change.



RESEARCH COMMENT

Envisioning a Scotland Without Poverty?
Appraising the 2021 manifestos of specialist interest groups.

In his regular column, Professor John H. McKendrick (Co-Director, Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University), reflects on the calls that civil society groups across Scotland are making in the run-up to the Scottish Parliament elections.



Electioneering can be troubling. Debating can be fractious, divisive and polemical. Careers are at stake. The effectiveness or desirability of often hard-won political and policy commitments will be questioned by political opponents. However, parliamentary elections are also opportunities for ‘big vision’ thinking about what we want our country to be.

The manifestos which attract most attention are those of the main political parties, which compete for public attention in the final weeks leading up to election day. Appraising these blueprints for their ‘tackling poverty’ credentials is a priority for anti-poverty activists, practitioners and researchers.

Equally significant in 2021 is A Scotland for all of Us, The Poverty Alliance’s 2021 Scottish Parliament Election Manifesto. It comprises twenty actions across five overarching themes (services for all; social security for all; a labour market for all; democratic communities for all; and an economy for all). Some of these actions are extensions of existing commitments (for example, expanding funded childcare provision to fifty hours per week), others formalise commitment to existing good practice (for example, attaching Fair Work criteria to all public sector grants, contract and funding as standard), while others propose new ideas (for example, exploring the use of wealth taxes). Collectively, these would be transformative for Scotland and would greatly reduce overall levels of poverty and the intensity of poverty across Scotland.

However, if we are serious about tackling poverty in Scotland, then it must be understood as everyone’s business. To that end, it is also useful to appraise whether concerns for tackling poverty are evident in the manifestos of specialist interest groups whose purpose is not to hold political office or tackle poverty. These specialist manifestos are often published well in advance of the ‘big vision’ political statements of the main political parties. They are also likely to be less well read beyond their constituent community.

On the page that follows, we apply a poverty lens to the priorities outlined in one dozen 2021 manifesto statements, each from a specialist interest group.

Poverty features to a greater and lesser extent among the priorities of interest groups (as indicated by their manifesto asks). For some, there is no mention of poverty or deprived areas (for example, Scottish Environment Link); for others, it is understood as important context, but is not developed into concrete actions (for example, Scottish Youth Parliament); others still focus on deprived areas and specify clear actions (for example, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Scotland); while others specify actions for groups experiencing poverty (for example, Inclusion Scotland).

Of course, a manifesto statement does not define the sum total of what an organisation values, and it does not encapsulate the range of actions taken by that organisation in tackling poverty. For example, Scottish universities are committed to widening access to those from deprived areas, and taking actions to tackle in-study poverty experienced by students. However, when tackling poverty and the challenges that are disproportionately encountered by those living in deprived areas is marginal in a manifesto, then questions need to be asked as to whether that sector (or organisation) is doing enough to contribute to the national effort to eradicate poverty.

Looking ahead to what Scotland could be, a close reading of these manifesto statements might prove useful to the anti-poverty sector in identifying priorities for building alliances and extending the reach of the anti-poverty activity in the years ahead.



RESEARCH COMMENT Cont'd

Organisation/s	2021 Manifesto	Mentions Poverty?	Mentions Deprivation?	Poverty Focus
Culture Counts	Cultural Manifesto 2021	No	No	None
Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations	Investing in housing and local communities: GWSF's manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament Elections	Yes, thrice	Yes, once	Acknowledges the role of community controlled housing associations in tackling child and family poverty. Calls for central funding to help social landlords "avoid swapping fuel poverty among tenants for rent poverty" (calling for support to assist CCHAs to meet energy efficiency standards). Asks that new social housing supply maintains a 'proportionate emphasis' to support the regeneration of Scotland's most deprived areas.
Inclusion Scotland	Rights and Renewal: Inclusion Scotland's Manifesto for the 2021-2026 Scottish Parliament	Yes	No	Ask to use Scottish Social Security powers to reduce the number of disabled people living in poverty (which will include making more money available through the Scottish Welfare Fund).
Obesity Action Scotland	Achieving Healthy Weight for All in Scotland: A manifesto for the next Scottish Parliament	No	Yes, once	Refers to evidence that inequalities (between most and least deprived areas) in overweight and obesity are widening.
Royal Pharmaceutical Society Scotland	The future of pharmacy in Scotland: RPS Manifesto for the Scottish Parliament Elections 2021	No	Yes, twice	Ask to empower community pharmacists and their teams in identifying and delivering solutions to reduce health inequalities (promoting community pharmacies as a means to redress the inverse care law whereby access to health care is poorest in the areas with greatest need)
Scotland's Mental Health Partnership	Promote, Prevent, Provide. Scotland's Mental Health Partnership. Scottish Parliament Election Manifesto	No	Yes, thrice	Calls for schools serving the most deprived areas to receive additional dedicated provision and early intervention support. Calls for improved access to nature and safe leisure environments, particularly for those living in the most deprived areas.
Scottish Academy of Medical Royal Colleges and Facilities	The Scottish Academy Manifesto 2021 – outlining policy priorities for Scottish healthcare	No	Yes, once	Take action to specifically encourage applications from Scottish domiciled applicants and under-represented groups (with those from 'deprived' backgrounds identified as one of the target groups).
Scottish Environment Link	A Manifesto for Nature and Climate – Scottish Parliament 2021 Election	No	No	None
Scottish Youth Parliament	From Scotland's Young People: The Scottish Youth Parliament manifesto 2021-2026	Yes	Yes, twice	Defines young people facing poverty as an 'at-risk' group and profiles the young people who engaged in their work in terms of the deprivation area status of their residence.
Stonewall Scotland, Equality Network, Scottish Trans Alliance and LGBT Youth Scotland	LGBTI Equality Manifesto – 2021-2026 Scottish Parliament	Yes, twice	No	Calls for action to ensure that LGBTI people are included in strategies to tackle social isolation and digital poverty. Calls to ensure that international development programmes ensure that LGBTI people are supported as part of wider health, anti-poverty and education programmes.
Universities Scotland	Manifesto 'Asks' for 2021 Scottish Parliament Election	No	Yes, once	Makes reference to improving loans to Scottish-domiciled students to lower barriers to postgraduate level study for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
Woodland Trust	Trees for a green and just recovery	No	Yes, once	Acknowledgement that lockdown restrictions have highlighted unequal access to good quality greenspace and woodland, particularly in areas of highest deprivation.



TRADE UNION COMMENT

An Education and Equity-led Recovery

School closures have impacted the lives of children and young people across the country, but they have particularly impacted children growing up in families on low incomes. Andrea Bradley (Assistant Secretary, EIS) outlines the steps that need to be taken to embed social justice in education as a key part of the post-pandemic recovery.

In the early stages of the pandemic when the foundations of Scottish education were being shaken to their core, in surveying the terrain, the EIS had clear sight of the fact that the shocks administered by Covid 19 would be felt most deeply by the most disadvantaged children and young people. They would bear the loss of in-person learning within school buildings most acutely, and their families would be least able to compensate that loss.

For this reason, we called for Equity Audits to be conducted- to assess where the equity gaps had widened with a view to these being filled through prioritisation of the existing resources, and also of the additional resources that we called for. The EIS did not want social justice in education to be a further casualty of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Scottish Government then undertook an Equity Audit the findings of which were published in January 2021, drawing many of the same conclusions on issues that the EIS had been signalling since last Spring, and that need to be acted upon immediately in the next parliament.

The Audit highlighted that digital poverty had prevented many young people from accessing online elements of the remote learning offer that schools were striving to make.

To bridge this aspect of the digital divide and safeguard against future scenarios whereby young people cannot access digital learning at home, all young people in Scotland must be provided devices and the necessary internet access to properly enable their use, not only in any future periods of school closure but as part of the education recovery response, and beyond. Young people's mental health was another area of focus within the Audit. It reported that around a fifth of young people experienced dips in mental health, with socio-economic factors at play in terms of how this was experienced. Young people from financially better off families worried about the impact of school closure on their academic performance; those from poorer families were anxious about the impact of the virus on their family members.

This disparity underlines the health inequalities between more affluent communities and families, and those where poverty is prevalent and where the pandemic has claimed more victims.

The disproportionate impact of the virus and associated mental health impacts on those living in poverty in Scotland should propel politicians towards stronger action towards greater equity of health outcomes for all citizens. The pre-pandemic health inequalities which amount to the quality and length of people's lives being determined in large part by income and postcode, this stark to see as the pandemic has raged, need to be addressed urgently. If not, the children and young people born into poorer families will inherit these disadvantages and be held back by them from day one of nursery until their last day of school and on into their adulthood.

At the root of this is family income. So many other outcomes such as in health and education are linked to how much money a family has coming in each month. The EIS has been consistently clear that child poverty does not exist in a vacuum and neither is the solution to poverty to be found solely in schools. Political will must be mustered to tackle poverty at source through policy and legislation in respect of employment and wages, sufficiency of social security, affordability of housing, utilities and public transport, and fair taxation.

In terms of immediate educational intervention, young people of all ages within the education system must have access to proper mental health support when they need it, this provided by professionals expert in mental health. Currently counsellors and educational psychologists are in far too short supply to meet the needs of the growing number of young people in mental health crisis, much of which can be attributed to austerity.

Turning to learning and achievement, the pandemic has forced some setbacks. Almost all headteachers and teachers who were consulted as part of the Equity Audit were of the view that children and young people who experience socio-economic disadvantage had made less progress in literacy and numeracy than predicted before the start of the period of remote learning.



TRADE UNION COMMENT

An Education and Equity-led Recovery

But far from adopting the reductionist, formulaic approaches touted by some which feature bald calculations of 'lost' learning time to be repaid with extra hours of literacy and numeracy-focused learning each week or within what should be holiday periods when children and young people should be at play, the national response has to be holistic.

Whilst literacy and numeracy are, of course, important, there is a significant role for art and music and dance and drama to play in nurturing young people's health and wellbeing through the recovery period- the whole child needs to be at the heart of our education recovery strategy. Free instrumental music lessons for any child wishing to learn would be a step in the right direction. No part of school education within a comprehensive system should have associated charges which effectively exclude those who cannot afford to pay. If it is to succeed, the education recovery strategy will require massive investment, and this will need to be sustained. Real recovery won't happen over the summer holidays.

Critical to genuine recovery that has equity at its heart will be additional staff being recruited and deployed in order to reduce class sizes and increase support for individual pupils.

Class size maxima of 20 is the objective of our current 20:20 Campaign. In our view, schools have been running on skeleton staffing for far too long. There are simply not enough teachers to deliver on the size of the ambition that Scotland (rightly) has for its education system.

As a result, for more than a decade, both teachers and young people have paid the price for government over-promising in terms of quality and underdelivering in terms of staffing resource to enable it.

The shortage of staffing has been clearly exposed during the pandemic with hundreds of teachers absent with Covid-related illness or from having to self-isolate and schools struggling to maintain provision. The additional temporary teachers funded by the Scottish Government have barely plugged the gaps. Meanwhile, there have been hundreds of supply teachers sitting at home, desperate for work but without a contract of employment.

The bottom line is that Scottish education needs more people working within it to help mitigate the impact of pre and post pandemic poverty.

Those teachers sitting at home must be employed and deployed to work with the young people who have missed out most. Every single available pair of hands should be to the wheel in supporting young people right now, especially those who have been most disadvantaged by school closures.

Further, we need ring-fenced funding for ASN provision enabling additional specialist staff to be in our schools to provide vital support to young people with an array of additional needs, a disproportionately high number of whom live in poverty.

We need qualified teachers recruited permanently to every nursery to enable early intervention to reduce the poverty-related achievement gap.

And we need targeted, enhanced support for the poorest children and families of the kind that many schools and local authorities have been providing during the periods of lockdown and school closure, and that the Equity Audit has shown to have led to the development of stronger relationships between home and school.

Teachers and school staff need access to professional learning such as that offered by EIS PACT to support understanding of the nature, causes and consequences of poverty and ways to mitigate it in school.

The EIS manifesto details our vision for an education-led recovery and includes a renewed call for universal free meals for all Nursery, Primary and Secondary aged children, including through holiday periods. The Scottish Government recently announced that the current provision will be extended to include P4-P7 from 2022. This is welcome but is not enough and too slow.

Hunger and stigma know no age boundaries or dates on the calendar.

If the new Scottish Government is serious about recovery and social justice, they need to dig deep and determinedly fund an education led recovery. If Scotland invests in the solid restoration of the foundations of our Education system now, and commits to building upon them in the interests of social justice from now onwards, as a society, we'll be healthier, stronger and more resilient to the kind of shocks inflicted by the Covid 19 pandemic, today and decade after decade in the future.



THIRD SECTOR COMMENT

Laying the foundations for a Scotland without poverty



Scotland’s child poverty reduction targets were set by the 2017 Child Poverty Act. But recent analysis shows that the interim 2023 is in danger of being missed as poverty’s grip continues to tighten on the lives of people across Scotland. Chris Birt (Deputy Director, Scotland, Joseph Rowntree Foundation) here sets out the need to place tackling poverty – and meeting those targets – at the heart of the next Scottish Parliament’s agenda

The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a harsh light on the realities of poverty in Scotland. People on the lowest incomes have been twice as likely to catch, and die from, this virus¹. The most recent Poverty and Inequality Statistics from the Scottish Government showed unacceptable levels of poverty going into the pandemic and this is a situation only like to have been made worse over the past twelve months.

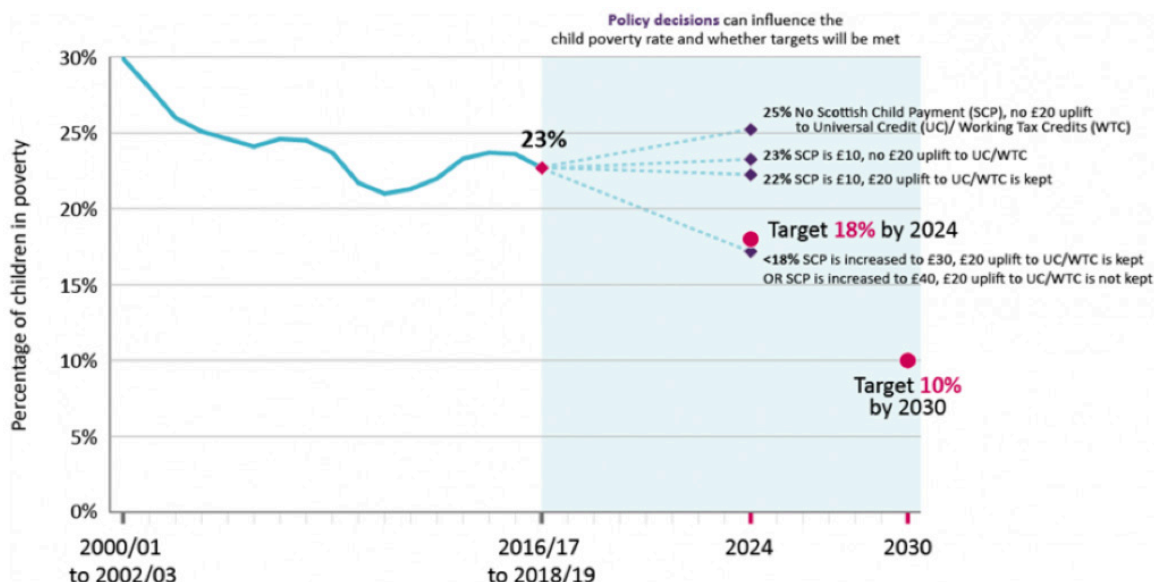
For people in poverty a return to normal is not good enough. Prior to coronavirus, one million people in Scotland were trapped in poverty, a quarter of them children with a relative child poverty rate of 24%. With far too many parents experiencing the anxiety and heartbreak of struggling every day to make ends meet. In the wake of all the grief and hardship caused by the pandemic, This new parliamentary term is our chance to set a course for a better future. A future where poverty is the exception, rather than the reality.

It’s clearly the path people in Scotland want to choose. Recent YouGov polling found² nearly three quarters of people thought poverty was a high priority going into this election. Around three quarters of people also thought that reducing poverty was possible.

The moral imperative to do more is supported by the public and the next Parliament has a duty to deliver on this. All of the parties in the Scottish Parliament voted unanimously for the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 which introduced statutory targets for reducing child poverty. The ultimate target is to bring relative child poverty below 10%³ by 2030 but the interim target of reaching less than 18% falls in the middle of the next Parliament in April 2024.

Our analysis from February⁴ showed that even with the introduction of the £10 child payment we are likely to miss that interim target by at least four percentage points, and by six percentage points if the UK Government is to cut Universal Credit and Working Tax Credits in October as planned.

Projected trajectories for the child poverty rate





It is vital that all our political leaders set out a credible path to meeting these targets⁵. To be credible we believe that the Scottish Child Payment will have to at least double by 2023/24.

A Scottish Child Payment of £20 per week (over £1,000 per year per child) will loosen the grip of poverty for tens of thousands of children and should reduce the poverty rate by at least 4 percentage points. While on its own it will still leave us short of the targets, it will certainly put us back on course and will provide a vital lifeline to families all over Scotland.

To meet those interim targets we will also need to support parents to increase their income from work and reduce housing costs. We should also concentrate efforts on supporting those parents in groups at particular risk of poverty such as single parents, those in a household where someone is disabled and people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Poverty cannot end in Scotland without dismantling the significant barriers that too many of these families face such as inflexible working practices and childcare, lack of accessible travel and racism.

One of the key causes, and symptoms, of poverty in Scotland is stigma. Where the stress of struggling to keep your head above water is compounded by discriminatory attitudes.

We hear of disabled people who are scared to apply for disability benefits, not just because of how they will be treated by systems but also because of the fear of judgement by their peers. Of renters facing “no DSS”. Of people in work being politely encouraged to tone down their accent.

The solution to that is compassion. It has been in high-supply in our response to the pandemic and we need to retain it to help us release people from the grip of poverty.

The pandemic has made Government strengthen social security, provide better protection for those at risk of redundancy, end roughsleeping and put their faith in communities to reach out to those most at need. Charities and social enterprises have blossomed, providing support to people all over the country. Businesses have adapted to their workforces, in many cases providing greater flexibility and support to their most important stakeholders, their people, their customers and their local communities.

We are driven by the hope the vaccinations will prevent Covid-19 from becoming endemic. We all can't wait to replace lockdowns and social distancing with meeting people and hugs. We're optimistic that that's not too far away. Yet for many of those experiencing poverty, regardless of the pandemic, they face endemic poverty. The easing of lockdown won't ease the challenges, and recovery from this pandemic could be longer and simply a journey back to a standard of living below what we all expect. This health crisis, though, has taught us just how much we can achieve if we set our minds and efforts to it.

If we are to deliver a Scotland without poverty we need to hold on to the compassion and common purpose that the pandemic has forced on us. To know that change is possible if we all focus on the goal and stick to it. We can end poverty in Scotland, we should end poverty in Scotland and if we embrace that spirit the next Parliament will put us on a one-way journey to doing so.



FOOTNOTES

1. Public Health Scotland online dashboard COVID-19 Daily Dashboard - PHS COVID-19 | Tableau Public
2. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-key-priority-people-scotland-advance-mays-election>
3. Also well as targets on absolute poverty, combined low income and material deprivation and persistent poverty.
4. The analysis showed that it was theoretically possible to meet the interim targets with a £40 per week Scottish Child Payment or with a £30 one if the uplift to UC/WTC were retained. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/scotlands-child-poverty-targets-are-possible-political-confidence-and-urgency>
5. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/laying-foundations-scotland-without-poverty>



MEDIA VIEW

Kirsteen Paterson of The National gives her take on the challenges facing the new Scottish Parliament, and the possibilities for cross-party action on poverty.

Before the pandemic, we knew almost one in four children were living in poverty and more than 600,000 households were struggling with fuel poverty. Things haven't got better over the past year and our 129 newly-returned MSPs face challenges that cannot be understated.

Many Scots have lost their jobs, been furloughed, had their pay cut or seen their hours reduced as their household bills increased. The Trussell Trust alone gave out more than 220,000 emergency food parcels in 2020-21 as a wealth of community food banks also arose.

Some commentators and campaigners have suggested that the crisis, as well as bringing untold struggle and grief, presents a window in which we can create significant social change. If they're right, this could be a transformational parliament.

There's broad consensus amongst the players in our five-party chamber that a return to pre-pandemic normality would be wrong. There's across-the-board commitment to at least double the Scottish Child Payment to £20 per child, per week, during the course of this parliament. On housing, it's agreed that more affordable homes must be built, but numbers vary wildly from 60,000 to 200,000 over ten years. There are questions around delivery here and further issues around the complex problem of homelessness.

The number of children placed in temporary accommodation has grown in recent years and these households can't afford to wait for the completion of new projects, they need solutions now. Meanwhile, there are many households currently teetering on the brink of losing their homes as a result of Covid's hit on their finances.

If housing and homelessness is a priority for every party, then it's to be hoped that there will also be measures enacted to help prevent further homelessness. Perhaps this is where a minimum income guarantee could come in, as pledged by the SNP, Greens and Labour. Paid for through a new dedicated supplement on higher rate taxpayers, this could eradicate poverty by 2030, according to the IPPR Scotland think tank.

The three parties have the parliamentary numbers to make this happen and there's public support for the concept, according to pre-election polling, but that's before we really know what "minimum" means, what extra our richer citizens would need to pay and whether this would be in conflict with the existing welfare system, many parts of which are reserved to Westminster.

Maybe this is what will determine the scale of achievement in this parliament - the relationship between Bute House and Downing Street. It'll not only influence what, if any, concessions the Scottish Parliament can



MEDIA VIEW



secure to enable it to pursue a policy agenda, but also the way MSPs from different parties work with, or against, each other.

The constitutional dispute dominates Scottish political discourse but is not the only area where the Yes and No sides clash. There was a furious row around the months-long negotiation of the fiscal framework by John Swinney in 2016 and a review is set to take place this year at a time when sentiments between the administrations are hardly congenial. Their differences on policy are abundantly clear in the approach to Brexit and the running war of words between SNP ministers and the Conservative-run Home Office over immigration enforcement raids.

The UK Government is also taking the Scottish Government to the UK's Supreme Court to decide if measures in recently-passed bills concerning child rights and local self-government are outwith Scottish competence.

It's to be hoped that the unanimous backing for these bills in Holyrood will lead to a similarly united front as court dates loom - and that same unity will deliver the anti-poverty solutions the country needs. Failure would cost too much.

Cat Stewart, Chief Reporter for the Glasgow Times and Herald columnist, looks at the prospects for change in a parliamentary term where constitutional issues may dominate.

It was a stark picture of the effects of poverty: in February an image went viral of people queueing in the snow in

George Square for food. A relatively unseen issue made visible in Glasgow's civic heart.

The public response was one of shock yet for those working in the third sector, this image of need would have come as no surprise.

The media reports bald facts – recent research for the End Child Poverty coalition found child poverty had risen in every local authority in Scotland since 2015, say, or hundreds of people in the asylum system being left suddenly without money or food due to a Home Office contract change – but it is the human stories that make the greatest impact.

This year's election, it goes without saying, was held in extraordinary circumstances. Not only as it was held against the backdrop of a pandemic but also because it was fought as a political battle with only one inevitable outcome - the SNP returning for a record fourth term in government in Scotland with Nicola Sturgeon continuing as First Minister.



Assured of their place on the opposition benches, the only way now for the other main parties is to robustly hold the SNP to account.

Of course, the other main focus of the election was the constitutional question with the discussions around Scottish independence ongoing. When it comes to implementing policies to tackle poverty, this conversation comes to the fore again.

During the pandemic, when closures across industries led to job losses, the Westminster government gave a Universal Credit uplift of £20 per week.



MEDIA VIEW

Seeing the positive effect this had, it seemed sensible and right to make the increase permanent.

However, it looks likely the planned removal of the uplift will go ahead in September with claims that step will neutralise the impact of the increase in the Scottish Child Payment, a policy without equivalent in England and one that is a significant use of the Scottish Government's new powers over benefits.

In its manifesto, the Scottish Tories made note of the £20 uplift introduced under the "broad shoulders" of the UK Government and said its plan is to "build on this" - yet Douglas Ross's calls to keep the uplift are unlikely to persuade his southern counterparts.

The recent Queen's Speech offered the UK Government the opportunity to pledge reform to Universal Credit, not only to cement the £20 uplift as permanent but to improve the application process and abolish sanctions. It did not do so.

When Mr Ross resigned from his ministerial role in the Scotland Office following Dominic Cummings's eye-check drive to Barnard Castle, he did so to try to position himself as a man of principle and has continued to try to create distance between himself and the ongoing sleaze of Boris Johnson's government. This doesn't seem to have much helped him gain standing in the eyes of Scottish voters and instead he seems toothless both north and south of the border.

The Tories return to power in England leaves Scotland open to DWP reforms while Priti Patel's hostile immigration policies harm vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers. A return to austerity is also a post-pandemic possibility.

The more these issues leech from Westminster to negatively affect Scots, the more to the constitutional question will come to the fore.

Away from independence, there was a certain amount of crossover in the main party manifestos - pledges to build affordable homes; free school meal increases; the implementation of the 1140 nursery hours and increased wraparound care; minimum income guarantee.

Ms Sturgeon has been vocal regarding her party's plans to address poverty in Scotland with a particular focus on child poverty yet despite these efforts, child poverty continues to rise and as the pandemic resolves, the financial and social toll will be significant.

An alliance with the Scottish Greens, however, shows a desire to look at policies afresh.

Yes, it will show a necessary united front on the constitutional issue, but the Greens put up an impressive election campaign and have shown themselves to be a party to reckon with. They will push the SNP and the SNP needs to be pushed, such as on the question of raising revenue - while SNP ministers prefer an income freeze tax the Greens favour a wealth tax and what they would term a radical approach to redistribution.

In the last parliament they secured the free bus travel for under 19s as part of the price for supporting the SNP budget, and the party also claims credit for extending free school meals, so they have a track record of pressing the SNP on tackling inequality.



They are likely to keep pushing, also, for the Basic Income Guarantee, a policy that would make a real difference to living standards.

The introduction in February of the increased Scottish Child Payment had cross party support and the hope is that consensus can be found on other issues that will make meaningful change to the circumstances of those living in poverty in Scotland, leaving images like that of February soup kitchen queues consigned to the past.



ROAD BLOCKS TO AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT FOR ALL IN SCOTLAND



Dr Laura Robertson is a Research Officer at the Poverty Alliance, and co-authored a new report – commissioned by Transport Scotland – on people living on low incomes' experiences of public transport in Scotland.

Across Scotland families and young people on low incomes are being priced out of using public transport due to high costs and lack of reliable, accessible transport. That's the key findings from a report recently published by the Poverty Alliance, commissioned by Transport Scotland, that highlights key transport challenges faced by low-income families in Scotland.

For many of the families that took part in the research, public transport costs are unaffordable and represent a major source of anxiety. For families in low-paid jobs or accessing social security, costs of public transport were a huge proportion of their already-stretched budgets.

For asylum seekers we spoke to, whose weekly income is just £39.63 a week, transport costs mean they cannot afford to see friends and family and maintain the kind of connections that we all rely upon.

Families we spoke to rely on public transport to access vital public services including health care and childcare. But our transport system is failing too many families and young people on low incomes, and preventing them accessing the services they are entitled to. Many reported having to walk long distances each day to access the services they need, or reported reducing spending on day-to-day necessities such as food in order to cover transport costs.



ROAD BLOCKS TO AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT FOR ALL IN SCOTLAND



“I don’t tend to go on transport for days out as it costs too much as a family to travel, it’s usually as a treat to use a bus or a train”. (Single parent, 2 children, urban area)

In rural areas, inadequate transport provision is even more of a problem. A lone parent we spoke to leaves her home at 7am everyday for a 9am start at college. With no transport available to reach her child’s nursery, she must walk there every morning before walking to catch a bus into town and running to college.

“I had a breakdown as both myself and my child were exhausted from this due to heavy traffic and late picking up child and being charged late fees”. (Single parent, 1 child, rural area)

Costs of transport are also a major barrier for young people on low incomes moving from school into college or work.

“I’ve actually had to postpone a lot of interviews because of the fact that I couldn’t get there because of the money issues”. (Sixteen-year-old female)

We also heard of frequent experiences of racism and discrimination experienced by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic parents on buses. Incidents were

described whereby participants were challenged over having different hairstyles, speaking in different languages, or being accused of paying incorrect fares.

It is clear from our research that unaffordable public transport is preventing young people and families being able to access public services and take up opportunities around education, employment and training.

We need action to ensure our transport system is affordable and accessible for all, and so that everyone can participate in a more just and greener Scotland.

That means – as people told us – expanding free public transport to more people on low incomes as well as taking action to ensure communities, especially rural communities, are better connected. We need the voices in this report not only to be heard, but to be acted on, and for our transport system to be redesigned so that it works for everyone.



Women's equality pre- and post-election 2021

Even before the pandemic, gender inequality was locking women across Scotland into poverty. But the pandemic has supercharged that inequality and disproportionately impacted the lives of women. Here, Eilidh Dickson (Policy and Parliamentary Manager, Engender) outlines the steps that the new Scottish Parliament must take to tackle this inequality.



Covid-19 and the restrictions needed to manage the worst of its health impacts have not been the great leveller some predicted at the outset of this crisis.

Instead, the course of the pandemic has rolled the clock back on some of the hard won yet fragile progress towards women's equality. UN Women suggests that the impact of the pandemic for global progress on women's rights could be reversed as much as 25 years.

In Scotland and the UK, one of the critical omissions in implementing the response to Covid-19 was a failure to consider how gendered divisions in work – paid and unpaid – would impact on women. The recession that followed the financial crash in 2008 largely impacted on the sectors and jobs where men's employment dominates, such as manufacturing. This downturn is highly likely to affect the sectors where women's jobs outnumber men's – retail, hospitality and tourism. Many women in these sectors are young and women of colour, often employed part-time or on precarious contracts. Ending furlough and business support too soon or too abruptly will affect them most by further destabilising these sectors.

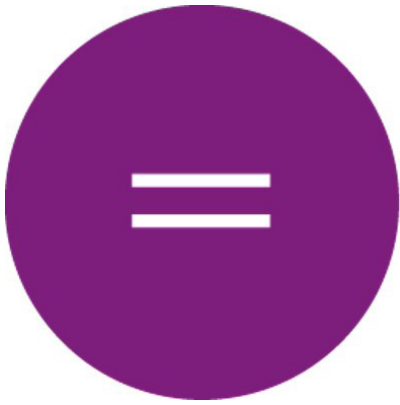
Women have also been forced to give up paid work in response to the escalating demands at home. Over the course of the pandemic women have described to us via

our 'Women Covid Scotland' platform the ways in which the lack of support has affected their earnings, made them more reliant on their partners, left them managing the vast majority of childcare, home schooling and domestic work and ultimately their opportunities and wellbeing negatively affected. Isolation, stress, anxiety, depression and other descriptions of poor mental health run through these stories. Despite the narratives about crashing productivity, women are busier than ever and yet more at risk of poverty and economic exclusion. Disabled people's organisations and carers organisations have demonstrated how changes or reductions in social care packages have undermined the rights of disabled women and have also displaced care responsibilities onto female family members. Survey data published for Carers Week 2020 suggests that there are now as many as 1.1 million unpaid carers in Scotland, of which 61 per cent are women. This is an increase of 392,000 since the start of the crisis, with 78 per cent of carers having to provide more care than they were before the outbreak. School closures, home-schooling and self-isolation protocols in schools all impact on women's daily balancing of roles. Time survey evidence from the UK, US and Germany found over the first lockdown, regardless of whether they are also doing paid work, women at home were spending six hours providing childcare and home schooling every working day while fathers provided around four and mothers were interrupted 50 per cent more frequently. While mothers in paid work previously averaged 73 per cent of the hours worked by fathers, this fell to 68 per cent in the first half of last year.

While furlough was – belatedly - clearly extended to cover circumstances where staff were unable to work because of childcare or care, research from the TUC showed that seven in ten mothers who asked for furlough saw their request turned down. Findings from a survey developed by Engender, Close the Gap, the UK Women's Budget Group, Fawcett Society, Women's Equality Network Wales, and Northern Ireland Women's Budget Group have shown that 21 per cent of men with children in Scotland said they would be given time off with full pay by their employer in the event of additional caring responsibilities as a result of school closures or having to self-isolate, compared to 14 per cent of women.



Women's equality pre- and post-election 2021



ENGENDER

This research also confirmed that women are more likely to report that they are struggling to make ends meet than men. Disabled women and BME women reported significant concerns about their incomes - over half of BME women reported that they were struggling to make ends meet and were more than 2.5 times more likely than white women to report lost working hours over the course of the crisis. Women working part-time were 11 percentage points more likely to report losing working hours (26 per cent) than their full-time counterparts (15 per cent).

However, even before the pandemic, women were poorer than men, more likely to rely on social security for all or part of their income and less likely to have equal access to resources and equal decision-making power about how household income was spent. Temporary measures like furlough and the £20 per week uplift on Universal Credit are not enough, but so far are acting as a buffer for at least some women. We should all be concerned about what happens if and when the pandemic support in place at Scottish and at UK level is removed.

May's election showed that gender equality and women's rights and wellbeing in Scotland are under real and significant pressure and the - albeit limited - progress towards women's economic, social and political equality are at risk of rollback. It is vital that in our new Scottish Government and Parliament, women are central to the approach to recovery.

Engender's 2021 election manifesto called for targeted action in eight policy areas as part of a vision for a feminist recovery: care for others, the economy, violence against women and girls, women's rights, health and wellbeing, equal access to decision-making, public space and social security.

We cannot view women's poverty and exclusion as something that can be dealt with in a single action, but instead look to better integrate gender expertise and women's lived experience throughout policy and practice.

For example, as women are more likely to provide unpaid care than men, are four times as likely to give up paid work to provide care and are more likely to be in low-paid part-time employment than male carers. More than 2.5 times as many women are eligible to receive carers allowance than men. With rising levels of unpaid care being provided by women, there is an immediate need to bring forward long awaited plans for a Scottish Carers' Assistance capable of reaching as many carers as possible and alleviating the financial costs of care work. However, we need even more ambition, and we also believe that there is a need to develop new forms of support for carers that are fully flexible, can be combined with paid work, education or training and which are paid at (at least) the level of the real living wage in order to recognise unpaid care as work. We also need to make sure that decisions about resource allocation pay attention to the gendered differences in women and men's lives and that measures to address women and children's poverty - like the Scottish Child Payment - are properly targeted and available in practice to women doing the majority of care for children.

The work on recovery from this pandemic is by no means over. The Social Renewal Advisory Board and the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery have each set out clear recommendations for action to ensure that recovery does not further entrench inequality and oppression of marginalised groups, including action to support carers, reforms to childcare and incorporation of human rights.



Women's equality pre- and post-election 2021

The previous Scottish Government announced shortly before the election its support for a new human rights bill that would incorporate international human rights treaties into Scots Law.

This includes a commitment to incorporating the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as economic, social and cultural rights, the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. CEDAW incorporation has been a call of Engender's for many years, and we believe that giving women real accountability in Scottish courts for breaches of their human rights – including health, social security, education and access to finances – will make a meaningful difference to women's lives.

CEDAW calls for more than just formal equality in law but requires action to meaningfully address systemic and structural inequalities that maintain women's inequality with men, including targeted action. Substantive equality means that the Scottish Government and other actors will be required to look at women's lives and the condition of their lives as a measure of whether equality has been achieved and there will be accountability across the Scottish legal system. In doing so, we can strengthen our advocacy on action to tackle the issues that maintain women's economic inequality and continue to impede women's access to secure, quality paid work or social security that maintains dignity and participation.

Eradicating poverty, discrimination and the impact of outdated gender norms must be a central factor of every decision about how we move forward post-election and into a post-Covid recovery project.



The Real Living Wage

The real Living Wage was created to help ensure people earn a wage that allows them to meet everyday needs and live a decent life. A memorable milestone has now been reached in this campaign against low pay. Pure Spa & Beauty has become the 2,000th accredited Living Wage employer in Scotland. Its commitment will ensure more than 130 staff receive at least the real Living Wage of £9.50, which is significantly higher than the Government minimum for over-23s, which currently stands at £8.91 per hour.

Employers like Pure Spa recognise the vital importance of fair pay for their employees, and the contribution that makes to tackle the rising tide of poverty in Scotland. Accreditation has meant more than 45,600 workers have received a pay increase to the real Living Wage – delivering more than £240 million of extra wages into the pockets of low paid workers.

Passing the 2,000 mark is a sign of strength of the Living Wage movement in Scotland. This strength comes from the employers who want to see things done differently, who want to demonstrate that they value their workers and those who work regularly on their behalf. But it also comes from the real experiences of low-paid workers, from the activity of campaigners and trade unions, and from politicians who have joined together to campaign against in-work poverty.

Living Wage Scotland has been central to the development of this movement since it was formed in 2014. SSE was among the first 20 Living Wage employers in Scotland and has been enthusiastic supporters ever since. As the Chair of the Living Wage Scotland leadership group, I work with representatives from large corporates, small business, academics, third sector leaders and public sector institutions – all helping Living Wage Scotland achieve its aim of maximising the number of workers earning at least the real Living Wage. Business leadership on this issue has been an important part of ensuring the continued growth of the Living Wage movement in Scotland.

And now – with a 2,000 strong and growing network of Living Wage employers in Scotland – we become more ambitious. By working with our network we will find ways to further enhance work quality and tackle in-work poverty in Scotland. The Living Hours scheme is an example of this. Launched by the Living Wage Foundation in 2019, it recognises that secure contracts and hours are needed alongside a real Living Wage.



Scotland's businesses are once again demonstrating leadership on this: SSE joined Standard Life Ayr and 1st Alliance Credit Union to be among the first Living Wage employers in the UK to also become Living Hours accredited. SSE will continue our approach of sharing our experience with others, to encourage more employers to join us in creating better quality jobs as part of sustainable business models.

Congratulations to Pure Spa & Beauty, and to all the other employers before them that have been part of the journey. To celebrate this achievement, as we recover from the major disruptions to our economy, is both significant and inspiring. We should take this as a strong signal of intent from businesses that we want fairness and respect to be the foundation of our future success

Kate Wallace Lockhart is Head of Social Impact at SSE





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

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.

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.