

Separate support?

Attitudes to social security
in Scotland

Anvar Sarygulov and
Phoebe Arslanagić-Wakefield

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First published in Great Britain in 2020

by Bright Blue Campaign
ISBN: 978-1-911128-16-8

www.brightblue.org.uk

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Acknowledgements

This report has been made possible by the generous support of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The ideas expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the sponsor.

Thanks are due to the members of the advisory group, who have provided valuable input at the various stages of this project: John McKendrick, Annie Gunner-Logan, Peter Kelly and Neil Cowan.

We would like to thank Jim McCormick, Deborah Hay and Iain Porter for their thoughts and advice.

We would also like to thank Sam Robinson and Joseph Silke who have helped with the delivery of this report, and offer special thanks to Ryan Shorthouse for his thoughtful editing and suggestions.

Opinium conducted the polling for this report and we would like to thank James Crouch and the rest of the team for their hard work and attention to detail.

The polling included an online survey of 3,002 Scottish adults and was conducted between 4th and 9th December 2019.

Executive summary

The Scotland Act 2016 devolved a range of powers over the social security system from Westminster to Holyrood. It led to the full devolution of 11 benefits, giving the Scottish Parliament control over approximately £3.5 billion of yearly social security payments. The Scottish Parliament has the power to change these 11 benefits in all their aspects: value, eligibility and scope.

As Chapter One explains in detail, the partial transfer of benefits delivery from the UK's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to Social Security Scotland (SSS) is ongoing, with the introduction of changes or replacements to 11 benefits expected to be completed by the end of 2021, and the transfer of all claimants to these reformed benefits to be completed by 2024. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to delay the current rollout timetable. These devolved benefits will be paid to more than 1.4 million people once devolution is fully complete.

The evolving design of the new Scottish social security system by the SNP Government is notably rooted in addressing the perceived deficiencies of the approach to welfare reform by Conservative-led Governments in Westminster since 2010.

To date, however, there has been little examination of Scottish public attitudes on how social security is being and should be reformed in Scotland. This report changes this.

In this report, we conduct and analyse polling of Scots to explore attitudes to social security reform in Scotland. It is important to note that

these attitudes were unearthed prior to the current COVID-19 crisis.

Our report seeks to explore both the broad attitudes of Scots on the purpose and effectiveness of the social security system, and their views on specific reforms that have been or will be introduced by the Scottish Government. In addition, we also ask about a range of potential and alternative policies, to guide future social security reform in Scotland, and to see if alternative measures may be more popular. The analysis explores how responses vary by socio-demographic and voting characteristics, allowing us to unearth differentiation in Scottish public attitudes by social, economic and political divides.

Focus of this research and the methodology

This report addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of the Scottish population towards the current but pre-COVID-19 purpose, role and effectiveness of the social security system?
2. What are the attitudes of the Scottish population towards pre-COVID-19 promised and possible other policies for social security reform?
3. How do the attitudes of the Scottish population towards social security reform vary according to different socio-demographic characteristics and voting intention?

To answer these research questions, we designed and undertook polling with Opinium of a representative weighted sample of Scottish adults, as detailed in Chapter Two. This polling allowed us to thoroughly examine the views of Scots on the purpose, effectiveness and future of the Scottish social security system. The large sample size we used enabled us to consider specific socio-demographic and voting characteristics, such as age, household income, homeownership, direct experience of disability, 2017 General Election vote, 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum vote and 2016 EU Referendum vote.

This polling enabled us to identify what Scots think about the following issues: the broad attitudes of Scots towards the purpose and effectiveness of social security (Chapter Three), knowledge of and attitudes towards the extent of, and the principles for, devolution of Scottish social security (Chapter Four), perceptions of Universal Credit broadly and of specific reforms introduced by the Scottish Government (Chapter Five), attitudes to new devolved low income, disability and children benefits (Chapter Six), and the extent of support for a range of alternative policies for the Scottish social security system (Chapter Seven).

The purpose and effectiveness of social security

Scots do not perceive the current social security system to be overly generous, with 32% of respondents agreeing and 43% disagreeing with the statement that “If welfare/social security benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet”. Furthermore, a majority (64%) of Scots agree that “cutting social security would damage too many people’s lives”, while just 13% disagreed.

A majority of Scots believe that social security spending should be increased for a number of different claimant groups: carers (72%), disabled people (67%), low-income working parents (61%) and those who have previously paid income tax and national insurance for a number of years (50%). There was, nevertheless, more scepticism about additional spending on unemployed claimants, with Scots more likely to think that spending on unemployed people should stay the same (45%). The main variance in views was by voting history, with Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters notably less likely to support increased spending on social security for different groups than Labour and SNP voters.

A majority of Scots believe that there is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland (70%), that poverty has increased in the previous decade (62%), and almost half believe that it will continue to increase in the next decade

(47%), indicating there is a major degree of concern among the Scottish public about poverty in reference to the past, present and future.

These perceptions about poverty are shared across different socio-demographic groups, though those who are on lower incomes and those who are renting are slightly more likely to hold these concerns. On the other hand, Conservative voters were notably less likely to be concerned about levels of poverty, though it was still the most widely held view among these voters that there was quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland.

The devolved social security system

Awareness among the Scottish public of the benefits that are being devolved to Scotland is low, with a majority of Scots not knowing or giving the wrong answer when asked about whether a range of benefits have been devolved or not. Only 35% of Scots said that Carer's Allowance is now administered by the Scottish Government, while only 28% of Scots know that Personal Independence Payment will be administered by the Scottish Government.

A clear majority of Scots want the Scottish Parliament to decide most or all of Scotland's social security policy (60%), as opposed to 13% who would like most or all of it to be decided by the UK Parliament, and 18% who would like it to be decided equally. While there is major differentiation by political party and independence referendum voting history, it is notable that more than half of Labour (62%) and Liberal Democrat (57%) voters and a significant number of those who voted 'No' in the Scottish Independence Referendum (43%) share this view, while only a small minority (29%) of Conservative voters want most or all of social security policy to be decided by the Scottish Parliament.

Only 19% of Scots would like to see social security spending in Scotland be reduced. They are most likely (41%) to want social security spending in Scotland to be increased. However, there is no clear agreement on how any such increase in Scottish social security spending should be funded amongst those who would like to see an

increase, with 56% wishing to fund it by raising taxes and 44% by spending less on other areas.

Scots are most likely to think that the social security system should promote personal responsibility, with a majority of Scots supportive of this principle (72%). Furthermore, majorities across socio-demographic and voting groups are found for the principle that social security should promote personal responsibility, but also for other principles commonly associated with centre-right philosophy such as that social security should only be a safety net (59%), that it should be conditional on strict requirements (58%) and that those who have paid income tax and NI for a greater number of years should receive greater help (64%).

A majority of Scots also supported the principles introduced by the Scottish Government through their social security reform, including that social security is a public service (65%), that it is a human right (57%), and that it should be actively promoted to those who are eligible (61%). Interestingly, more than half of Scots also think social security should help to reduce unequal incomes and that it should be universal (53%), and few Scots (18%) believe that social security should be provided primarily by family or charity, rather than the state.

Universal Credit

Overall, general perceptions of Universal Credit are notably negative, with a majority (54%) of Scots describing the introduction of Universal Credit as unsuccessful, 11% as successful and 22% as neither successful nor successful.

Those who see the introduction of Universal Credit as unsuccessful are split on why they have such a view, with 52% believing that the idea behind Universal Credit is poor, leading to poor implementation, while 41% believe that while the implementation has been poor, the idea itself is sensible. Conservative voters were less likely to describe it as unsuccessful, but still only a relatively small minority (15%) of them described it as successful explicitly.

In regards to conditionality and sanctioning in the Universal Credit

system, there is majority support for the presence of specific conditions (71%) and sanctions (52%) for unemployed claimants.

Setting specific conditions (37% support and 28% oppose) and sanctions (46% support and 26% oppose) for low-income, part-time working benefit claimants is more divisive, as is requiring low-income parents of young children to work at least 16 hours a week (38% support and 32% oppose), and requiring self-employed claimants to earn a specific amount a week (40% support and 23% oppose). Both Labour and SNP voters tended to be fairly divided on conditionality and sanctioning measures for different claimant groups, while Conservative voters tended to support them.

There are high levels of support for the Universal Credit Scottish Choices programme, with 62% supporting claimants being able to choose how often they are paid and 74% supporting being able to pay the housing element of Universal Credit directly to a landlord. There is also support for allowing households to split payments (57%), which has been promised but is yet to be delivered by the Scottish Government. However, respondents are divided on whether claimants should receive an advance payment to help them deal with the five-week wait as a loan (43%), as is the case or now, or a grant, with the former being preferred by a small margin (43% to 39%).

New devolved benefits

Nearly half of Scots (47%) believe that it is too hard to apply for disability benefits, while 19% believe that it is too easy to apply for them, and 14% believe that it is neither too easy nor too hard. This view is more widespread amongst those on lower incomes and, unsurprisingly, those with a direct experience of disability, with seven in ten amongst the latter group sharing this view.

Sixty-one percent of Scots support the Scottish Government's reduction of face-to-face assessments when making disability benefit decisions, while only 29% believe that almost all applicants should go through a face-to-face assessment. There is majority support across all

socio-demographic and voting groups for the Scottish Government's reform of allowing existing information to be used instead of face-to-face assessments when making disability benefit decisions.

However, the Scottish public is quite agnostic about whether assessments are done by a government body or a private company, with 45% expressing that it does not matter if the same processes are followed, 36% believing that a government body is best and 6% saying the same about a private company.

Overall, there is a high level of support among Scots for a range of benefits that have been devolved to the Scottish Government to assist people on low incomes with specific costs such as fuel costs (79%), funeral costs (71%) and council tax costs (73%).

There are high levels of support for the Scottish Child Payment, with 40% believing that £10 per week is the right amount while 32% believe that it should be higher. However, nearly a quarter (24%) think it should not be introduced and 4% believe that it should be set below £10.

Scots are also more likely, but not by a majority, to support four Best Start Grants that the Scottish Government has introduced to help families with young children, with a range of 44% to 50% supporting all four of them, and 22% to 27% opposing all of them.

The level of support varies across socio-demographic and voting groups, with younger people, parents, renters, and Labour and SNP voters being more likely to be supportive of all these new devolved benefits for children.

Alternative policies for Scottish social security

A broad range of alternative ideas for improving social security attracted high levels of support. A majority of Scots support: Bright Blue's idea of an additional income supplement for those on low incomes based on previous National Insurance contributions (59%); Bright Blue's ideas of an establishment of an independent compensation scheme for benefit claimants that have been failed by the DWP, such as on timeliness of benefit payment (57%); a compulsory employment

support scheme for people with disabilities who are able to work (55%); government-funded incentives to employers for offering work to long-term unemployed (63%); and, attracting the highest level of support, allowing carers to keep more of their Carers Allowance depending on their earnings (65%).

Other ideas received lower levels of support, including: Bright Blue's ideas of introducing an additional income supplement for unemployed claimants who are judged by Jobcentre staff to have worked hard to find a new job (39% support and 18% oppose); Bright Blue's ideas of providing a government-sponsored loan for childcare costs which is paid back gradually, over a long period, once the parent is earning above a certain income (44% support and 20% oppose); and, finally, ending the two-child limit for benefits for children (39% support and 31% oppose).

Finally, we find some support for a Universal Basic Income (45%) among Scots, with 27% opposing and 19% choosing neither of the options. While there is majority support for UBI amongst younger people, renters, and Labour and SNP voters, support is notably lower amongst homeowners, older people and Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters. However, there is little agreement on how it should be funded, with 21% wanting to raise income taxes on those earning above £50,000, 20% preferring a wealth tax, and another 16% picking none of the above when presented with our choices. In addition, another 20% stated that they completely opposed UBI.

Main trends

The analysis finds that socio-demographic and voting characteristics of Scots affect their attitudes towards social security. A number of key characteristics emerge frequently as key markers of differing attitudes to social security. On the other hand, some socio-demographic characteristics appear to be important for varying attitudes to social security only occasionally.

We divide these socio-demographic and voting characteristics into two groups.

- A **primary group**, which includes characteristics that are consistently associated with differing views towards claimants of social security: age, homeownership, household income, direct experience of disability, 2017 general election vote, independence referendum vote and Brexit referendum vote.
- A **secondary group**, which includes characteristics that are sometimes associated with differences in attitudes to social security: gender, employment status and parenthood.

It must be stated that many of these characteristics will be correlated, meaning that we cannot attribute a causal relationship between being a member of a specific socio-demographic group or having a particular voting history and holding a specific attitude.

The final chapter (Chapter Eight) summarised the nine main findings from the report:

- A clear majority of Scots believe there is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland and that it has increased in the past decade.
- Scots do not believe that the social security system is too generous and most believe any further cuts to it will be damaging to people's lives.
- A clear majority of Scots want the Scottish Parliament to decide most or all of Scotland's social security policy.
- Scots are most likely to think that the social security system should promote personal responsibility, but the Scottish Government's new principles of social security also enjoy majority support.
- Most Scots think that the introduction of Universal Credit has been unsuccessful, but also support reforms to increase choice and conditionality in Universal Credit.
- Scots are most likely to think it is too hard to apply for disability benefits and support the Scottish Government's reforms to reduce face-to-face assessments, but are indifferent about whether assessments should be conducted by a governmental or private organisation.

- Scots support the Scottish Government's decision to maintain existing and introduce new devolved benefits for those on low incomes and for children, but support is lower for benefits for children.
- A majority of Scots support alternative policy ideas to improve the Scottish social security system.
- Scots are more likely to support the introduction of Universal Basic Income (UBI), but not by a majority.

This report shows that the social security principles and reforms of the Scottish Government, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, were broadly in line with Scottish public attitudes. But not always. And there is public support for alternative reforms to the Scottish social security system.

As the Scottish Government and Parliament continue to reform social security, it needs to consider repeating this comprehensive and detailed analysis of Scottish public attitudes — so its policies can be shaped and evaluated by the Scottish people.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Following the Smith Commission on devolution of powers in 2014, and the passing of the Scotland Act 2016, the Scottish Parliament and Government received extensive devolved powers over many policy areas, including welfare (or ‘social security’).¹ The delivery of these additional powers was integral to fulfilling the commitment made by the three major unionist parties — Conservative, Labour and the Liberal Democrats — during the 2014 Scottish Referendum campaign.²

The result of the 2019 General Election highlighted the growing political differences between Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. The Conservative Party managed to secure a large majority of seats in the House of Commons, with 43.6% of the total UK vote, giving them a strong mandate in Westminster. However, in Scotland, the Conservative Party lost both vote share and seats, while the Scottish National Party (SNP) won 48 out of 59 seats. This is likely to result in increasing divergence on political and policy priorities, including even greater demands for devolution. The union is fragile.

The Scotland Act 2016 devolved a range of powers over the social

1. The terms ‘welfare’ and ‘social security’ will be considered synonymous throughout this paper. The report will usually use the term ‘social security’, especially when it refers to specific Scottish reforms, in line with the terminology of the Scottish Government, and only use ‘welfare’ when referring specifically to the Westminster system.

2. The Smith Commission, “Report of the Smith Commission for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament”, https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20151202171029/http://www.smith-commission.scot/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Smith_Commission_Report-1.pdf (2014), 3.

security system from Westminster to Holyrood. It led to the full devolution of 11 benefits, giving the Scottish Parliament control over approximately £3.5 billion of yearly social security payments. The Scottish Parliament has the power to change these 11 benefits in all their aspects: value, eligibility and scope.

To implement these newly developed social security powers, a new executive agency was established by the Scottish Government through the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018: Social Security Scotland (SSS). The transfer of benefits delivery from the UK's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to SSS is ongoing, with the introduction of changes or replacements to 11 benefits expected to be completed by the end of 2021, and the transfer of all claimants to these reformed benefits to be completed by 2024.³ However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to delay the current rollout timetable.⁴ These devolved benefits will be paid to more than 1.4 million people once devolution is fully complete.⁵

The Scottish Government has delayed making major changes to some of the 11 devolved benefits, promising further consultations and proposals as SSS takes on full responsibility from DWP. Nonetheless, the Scottish Government has started introducing some minor changes.

The evolving design of the new Scottish social security system by the SNP Government is largely rooted in addressing the perceived deficiencies of the approach to welfare reform by Conservative-led Governments in Westminster since 2010. Scottish Government policy position papers on social security have particular references to “eradicating the adversarial nature” and “reversing the stigma” associated with the UK Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) regime and creating a system based on “dignity, respect and human

3. Shirley-Anne Somerville, *Devolution of benefits: ministerial statement*, 28 February 2019, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/devolution-of-benefits-ministerial-statement/>.

4. Shirley-Anne Somerville, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) – update on devolved benefits*, 1 April 2020, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/statement-covid-19-update-devolved-benefits/>.

5. Audit Scotland, “Social security: implementing the devolved powers”, https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2019/nr_190502_social_security.pdf (2019).

rights”⁶ There has also been a shift away from the term ‘welfare’ towards ‘social security’, which as aforementioned, we reflect in this paper.

Box 1.1. Principles of Scottish social security

The Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 established the legislative framework for the devolution of social security policy to Scotland, specifying the benefits which are devolved and the administrative system which will be responsible for their delivery. As outlined in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, the current Scottish Government envisages the social security system in Scotland to be based on eight principles.⁷

- Social security is an investment in the people of Scotland.
- Social security is itself a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights.
- The delivery of social security is a public service.
- Respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system.
- The Scottish social security system is to contribute to reducing poverty in Scotland.
- The Scottish social security system is to be designed with the people of Scotland on the basis of evidence.
- Opportunities are to be sought to continuously improve the Scottish social security system in ways which — put the needs of those who require assistance first, and advance equality and non-discrimination.
- The Scottish social security system is to be efficient and deliver value for money.

6. “Social Security principles and a rights based approach”, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/social-security-principles-and-a-rights-based-approach/> (2017).

7. Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2018/9/section/1/enacted>, Section 1.

While some of these principles are shared with the approach of the UK's DWP, this is a notable departure from the focus of early 2010s Conservative-led Coalition Government, which emphasised fairness, affordability, and reduction of dependency and fraud when introducing their reforms through the Welfare Reform Act 2012. Instead, in Scotland, there is a clear emphasis on a more rights-based approach to social security reform.

Already, some more specific reforms to the Scottish social security system have been introduced across six areas of social security: carers, disabled people, young children and their families, energy costs, funeral costs, and housing costs.

First, on carers: an additional twice-yearly payment to Carer's Allowance recipients, named Carer's Allowance Supplement, was introduced in September 2018 to bring payments to parity with Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). An additional yearly grant to help carers aged 16-18 who are still in school, known as Young Carer Grant, was also introduced in late 2019. Furthermore, in 2021, Carer's Allowance will be renamed as Carer's Assistance and a wide-ranging consultation on the benefit will be launched.

Second, on disabled people: the three main disability benefits — Child Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Attendance Allowance — will all be renamed as Child Disability Payment, Disability Assistance for Working-age People and Disability Assistance for Older People respectively from 2021.

A significant focus has been placed on changing the assessment procedures for these new Disability Assistance benefits, with a commitment that face-to-face assessments will only be required when there is no other practicable way to make a decision.⁸ Furthermore,

8. "Disability Assistance assessments: policy position paper", <https://www.gov.scot/publications/disability-assistance-assessments-policy-position-paper/> (2019).

assessments will be performed by SSS themselves, rather than a private company. Also, the assessment process itself will be adjusted: there will be an audio recording of all assessments and claimants will be able to immediately respond to ‘informal observations’, which are additional notes that assessors make from observations of a claimant’s behaviour at the assessment.

There are further minor changes to how reassessments of disability awards will be handled. While the new Disability Assistance benefits will not have a formal end date unlike existing UK-administered benefits, where the end date ranges from one to ten years, an award review date will always be provided. Subsequent reviews will also be light-touch where possible, rather than involving a full reassessment as is currently the case with the majority of cases in the UK.

Third, on young children and their families. A benefit that has faced significant changes is the Sure Start Maternity Grant. The Sure Start Maternity Grant, from late 2018, was renamed as Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment, with the payment increasing from £500 to £600 for the first child, and from £0 to £300 for every subsequent child. In addition, two new grants were introduced by the Scottish Government: Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment, a £250 grant to help with the costs of early learning when a child is between two and three-and-a-half years old; and, Best Start Grant School Age Payment, a £250 grant to help with the costs of preparing for school when a child starts primary education.

Fourth, on energy costs. Cold Spell and Winter Fuel Payments will be renamed Cold Spell Assistance and Winter Heating Assistance when SSS begins to manage them in 2020-2021. Eligibility for Winter Heating Assistance will be expanded, with families with children who receive the higher rate component of Child Disability Payment also qualifying for it from April 2020.⁹ No further changes are planned, but a review

9. “Cold Spell and Winter Heating Assistance: policy position paper”, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/winter-benefits-policy-position-paper/> (2019).

will be held to consider if additional adjustments are required.

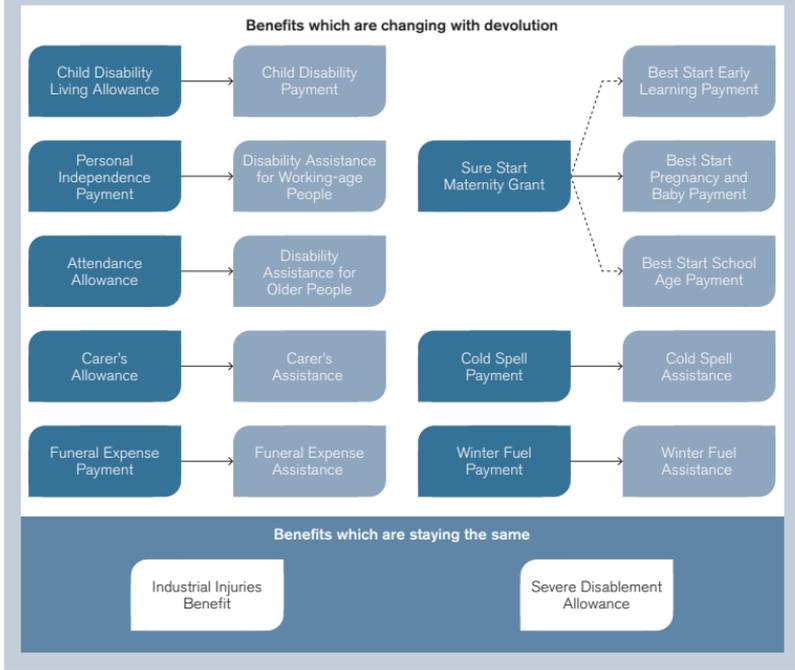
Fifth, on funeral costs: Funeral Expense Assistance was renamed Funeral Expense Payment in 2019, with the Scottish Government introducing a number of changes. This benefit is now uprated annually in line with inflation, and the rules to determine if a person's relationship to the deceased qualifies them for the benefit have been simplified.

Sixth, on housing costs. While the Scottish Government have had some powers over Discretionary Housing Payment since 2013, it was fully devolved to Scotland in mid-2017. So far, the key difference in the Scottish approach has been the use of Discretionary Housing Payments to address the so-called 'Bedroom Tax', the under-occupancy penalty placed on Housing Benefit claimants in social housing on a UK-wide level, which has brought social renting payments in-line with private renting under Local Housing Allowance rules. Currently, the Scottish Government pays the difference to affected social housing claimants through the Scottish Welfare Fund.

In addition, it should be noted that two devolved benefits, Industrial Injuries Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance, will actually continue to be delivered by DWP in practice and will not be changed by the Scottish Government due to the complexities associated with the former and legacy status of the latter.

Figure 1.1 below summarises how UK benefits are gradually changing as part of the Scottish Government's changes to the social security system.

Figure 1.1. Existing benefits devolved to the Scottish Government



Above and beyond these ongoing reforms, the Scotland Act 2016 also gives the Scottish Parliament the power to top up benefits which have not been devolved, and to create new benefits in areas which are not controlled by Westminster. It also enables the Scottish Parliament to legislate on Welfare Foods, which provides awards for food for pregnant parents and young children, and on employment programmes, which help people to get back to work, and on some aspects of Universal Credit.

So far, the Scottish Parliament has utilised these additional powers relatively sparingly, though it is early days. The most notable new benefit is the Scottish Child Payment, which was announced in 2019 and will provide a weekly £10 payment for each child in a low-income household receiving qualifying benefits such as Universal Credit.¹⁰ The

10. "Scottish Child Payment", <https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/scottish-child-payment/>.

creation of Scottish Child Payment was driven by concerns around child poverty, with Scotland recently introducing the most ambitious child poverty targets in the UK.¹¹ These targets state that less than 10% of children should be living in relative poverty and less than 5% in absolute poverty by 2030.¹²

The introduction of Universal Credit Choices in mid-2018 in Scotland gives a choice to all Universal Credit claimants between monthly and bi-monthly payments, and on whether the housing element of their award is paid directly to their landlord. This contrasts with the current DWP system where monthly payments and payments to claimants only are the default, with alternative payment arrangements given only in exceptional circumstances.¹³ Bright Blue has called for greater choice on the frequency and destination of Universal Credit payments to be extended to claimants in England and Wales in our recent report *Helping hand?*¹⁴

Public attitudes to social security reform

There is a popular perception that Scots tend to hold more left-wing political views than people in other parts of the UK. There is some evidence for a small attitudinal gap between Scottish and English people on poverty and the social security system. Seventy-eight percent of Scots agreed in 2011 that the gap between those on high and low incomes is too large in 2011, as opposed to 74% in England. Fifty-nine percent of Scots agreed that ordinary people do not get a fair share of the nation's wealth, compared to 55% in England.¹⁵ In 2017, 63% of people in Scotland wanted to increase taxes and spend more on health,

11. "Poverty in Scotland: methodology", <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Social-Welfare/IncomePoverty/ChildPovertyStrategy>.

12. Ibid.

13. Department for Work and Pensions, "Alternative Payment Arrangements", <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-alternative-payment-arrangements/alternative-payment-arrangements> (2019).

14. Ryan Shorthouse, Anvar Sarygulov and Sam Lampier, "Helping Hand? Improving Universal Credit", *Bright Blue*, <http://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Helping-hand.pdf> (2019).

15. ScotCen, "Is Scotland more left-wing than England?" <http://www.scotcen.org.uk/media/176048/2011-is-scotland-more-left-wing-than-england.pdf> (2011), 3.

education and social security, in comparison to 59% in England.¹⁶

However, it is important to consider that these gaps tend to be minor. More notably, Scottish trends in public opinion on social security and poverty often mirror English ones.

For example, the hardening in attitudes towards social security spending and decrease in concern on social security issues that occurred in the 2000s and early 2010s can be observed in both nations. Between 2000 and 2010, the level of agreement with the statement that “benefits for unemployed people are too low and cause hardship” fell from 43% to 30% in Scotland, while in England it fell from 40% to 23%.¹⁷ Between 2002 and 2011, the number of people who would have liked to see more spending on disabled people who cannot work fell from 69% to 51% in England, and from 74% to 62% in Scotland, while for more spending on retired people it fell from 72% to 58% in England, and from 78% to 65% in Scotland.¹⁸ While England and Scotland have continued to maintain a consistent and small gap on attitudes on social security and poverty, public opinion in both nations has moved overwhelmingly in the same direction.

Furthermore, existing polling suggests complexity and contradiction in Scots’ view on social security. In 2015, a majority (65%) of Scots supported the presence of a cap on the total payment of benefits to an individual (the ‘benefits cap’) at a level of £26,000. A majority (54%) also supported decreasing this benefits cap to £23,000.¹⁹ This shows that aspects of the UK Conservative Party’s welfare proposals were popular. Scots were also split on whether benefits were too accessible, with 35% saying that it was too easy to apply for benefits and wishing for more safeguards, while 36% believed that it was too difficult to apply for benefits and people who needed help were prevented from

16. NatCen, “British Social Attitudes Survey, 2017”, *UK Data Service*, <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=8450> (2017).

17. British Social Attitudes Survey, “Devolution”, https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/38963/bsa28_2devolution.pdf (2017), 36.

18. British Social Attitudes Survey, “Welfare”, 5. https://bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39058/bsa33_welfare.pdf (2017), 5.

19. “YouGov/Conservative Party Survey Results”, <http://www.scottishconservatives.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Welfare-poll.xls> (2015).

accessing it.²⁰ Finally, while 62% of Scots opposed increasing income tax to increase benefit payments, 62% also opposed funding an income tax cut through cutting benefit spending.²¹

Despite all of this, in 2017, a firm majority (80%) of Scots stated that the social security system was at least somewhat in need of additional money, only coming behind health and housing in terms of a service that was seen as needing more resources. This suggests there is a desire currently for greater spending on social security.²² Considering the somewhat contradictory evidence above, and the evolution of public opinion over the last couple of years, it is clear that more research is needed to better understand how Scots think about social security reform.

Considering that reforms to Scottish social security have only recently begun to be implemented, and some of its aspects are subject to further consultation and scrutiny, now is a vital time to gauge the attitudes of Scots to such issues. So far, there has been little public polling to examine these developments, with most available polling being on general attitudes and rarely conducted in Scotland or with a large subsample of Scottish adults.

This report will seek to provide greater evidence on attitudes to specific social security reforms that have occurred as a result of devolution. Our polling analysis will inform and enrich the current social security debate in Scotland by unearthing levels of public support for particular social security reforms, including on alternative principles and policies that could be implemented by the Scottish Government.

It should be noted that this polling and analysis was conducted before the current COVID-19 crisis, which has led to significant reforms and generosity to the UK-wide welfare system.

20. "YouGov/Times Survey Results", https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/hsx198o8mw/TimesResults_160310_ScotlandVI&Trackers.pdf (2016).

21. *Ibid.*

22. "Survation/The Sunday Post", <https://survation.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Final-Sunday-Post-Tables-301117APTb-1.pdf> (2017), 37.

Focus of this report

In this report, we conduct and analyse polling of Scots to explore attitudes to social security reform in Scotland. These attitudes were unearthed prior to the current COVID-19 crisis.

Our polling seeks to explore both the broad attitudes of Scots on the purpose and effectiveness of the social security system, and their views on specific reforms that have been or will be introduced by the Scottish Government. In addition, we also ask about a range of potential and alternative policies, to guide future social security reform in Scotland, and to see if alternative measures may be more popular. The analysis explores how responses vary by socio-demographic and voting characteristics, allowing us to unearth differentiation in Scottish public attitudes by social, economic and political divides.

In this report, we seek to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of the Scottish population towards the current but pre-COVID-19 purpose, role and effectiveness of the social security system?
2. What are the attitudes of the Scottish population towards pre-COVID-19 promised and possible other policies for social security reform?
3. How do the attitudes of the Scottish population towards social security reform differ according to different socio-demographic characteristics and voting intention?

This report is structured as follows:

- **Chapter Two** explains in detail the methodology employed for the public polling we conducted.
- **Chapter Three** explores the broad attitudes of Scots towards the purpose and effectiveness of social security.

- **Chapter Four** examines knowledge of and attitudes towards the extent of devolution of social security, before unearthing attitudes towards the principles of Scottish social security and how they should be applied.
- **Chapter Five** focuses on Universal Credit, looking at attitudes of Scots towards the introduction of the new UK-wide benefit and their views on changes that have been made to it by the Scottish Government.
- **Chapter Six** looks at Scottish public attitudes to a range of other benefits that have been devolved, including low income, disability and child benefits.
- **Chapter Seven** explores Scottish public support for a range of alternative policy proposals for the social security system.
- **Chapter Eight** concludes with the discussion of main trends in view and attitudes towards social security that have emerged from polling of Scots.

Chapter 2: Methodology

This report aims to discover the attitudes of Scots, across socio-political divides, towards the purpose and effectiveness of the current but pre-COVID-19 social security system, the policy changes proposed and introduced by the Scottish Government, and their views towards a wide range of potential principles and policies for social security. This chapter describes in detail the polling we used to achieve this.

As this report focuses specifically on public attitudes in Scotland, we have chosen to utilise the term ‘social security’ rather than ‘welfare’ throughout this report, in line with the terminology used by the current Scottish Government, treating the two terms as synonymous. However, we utilise the term ‘welfare’ when we are referring specifically to UK-wide legislation or reforms introduced by Westminster. In our polling questions, as the Annex shows, we utilised both terms to minimise potential for misunderstanding.

Polling approach

The polling was undertaken by Opinium. It was conducted before the current COVID-19 crisis between 4th and 9th December 2019. It consisted of 3,002 Scottish adults (who will be referred to as ‘Scots’ throughout this report), who were surveyed online through a panel. Using Office of National Statistics data, the sample has been weighted to be fully representative of the adult British population according to gender, age, employment status, car ownership, occupation and past

vote from the 2014 Independence Referendum, 2016 EU Referendum, and 2017 UK General Election. Further information about the approach is provided in the Annex, along with the list of polling questions.

As the polling was conducted immediately before the 2019 UK General Election, data from 2017 is used when discussing voters of specific parties.

Those who have a disability or who have a person with a disability in their household are referred to as those with ‘direct experience of disability’ throughout.

Those who own a house with or without a mortgage are referred to as ‘homeowners’, while those who are privately or socially renting are referred to as ‘renters’.

Those living in households with income below £17,000 will be referred to as ‘low-income households’, in line with previous work by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on low-income voters.²³ While this is a blunt threshold for defining a low-income household, it is the best possible approach considering we are polling thousands of people.

Box 2.1 lists all the cross-breaks that were used in the polling.

Box 2.1. Complete polling cross-breaks

- Gender
- Age
- Working status
- Occupation
- Housing status
- Educational qualifications
- Household income
- Disability
- Parenthood and age of children

23. Claire Ainsley and Frank Sodeen, “Every voter counts: winning over low income voters”, *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/every-voter-counts-winning-over-low-income-voters> (2019).

- 2017 UK General Election past vote
- Scottish Independence Referendum past vote
- European Union Referendum past vote

The polling has a large number of questions and cross-breaks, with many of them demonstrating marginal — or absence of — differences between different groups of Scottish adults. To ensure that prominence is given to the greatest divergences between social or political groups, the report will prioritise reporting cross-breaks which are most often or sometimes associated with differences in the data. These characteristics of frequent or occasional differentiation are revealed throughout the report and summarised towards the end.

Scottish Independence (Yes or No) and EU Referendum (Remain or Leave) past vote is often combined into one variable when reporting, splitting people into four categories of voters: Yes/Remain, Yes/Leave, No/Remain and No/Leave voters. In the data, attitudes of Yes voters and Remainers, and No voters and Leavers, were often very similar, but this concealed the notable and complex gradient of attitudes in the cross-break. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, for the majority of questions, Yes/Remain represented one pole, followed by Yes/Leave, then by No/Remain, and finally by No/Leave.

We have not reported any data for which the sample size was under 50. The proportion of respondents who responded ‘don’t know’ is reported throughout this report.

Chapter 3: **Broad attitudes to social security**

This chapter examines the broad attitudes of Scots towards the purpose and effectiveness of social security. First, we examine attitudes towards the generosity of the current social security system. Second, we consider which social groups the Scots believe the social security system should focus on. Third, we document the perceptions around the level of poverty in Scotland.

Generosity of the social security system

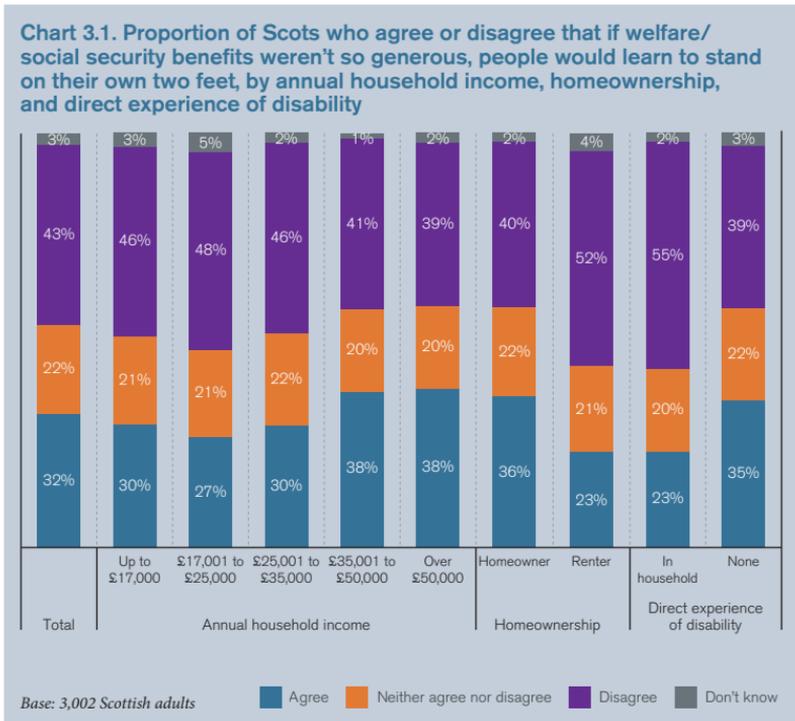
To assess attitudes towards levels of social security provision in Scotland, we first asked respondents the extent to which they agreed with two statements: “If welfare/social security benefits weren’t so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet” and “Cutting welfare/social security benefits would damage too many people’s lives”. These exact statements have been used frequently in previous polling, allowing us to make comparisons across time.

The overall response to the first statement — on people standing on their own two feet if social security weren’t so generous — suggests that Scots do not perceive the current social security system to be overly generous. While 32% of respondents agreed with the statement, more (43%) disagreed.

The response to the second statement — on cutting social security damaging people’s lives — is even more emphatic. A majority (64%) of Scots agree that cutting social security would damage too many people’s lives, while just 13% disagreed.

Overall, these responses appear to be in line with recent UK-wide polling conducted for the ongoing British Social Attitudes project. In 2017, NatCen found that 43% of UK respondents agreed that if welfare benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet and 56% agreed that cutting welfare benefits would damage too many people's lives.²⁴ As noted in Chapter One, this is in line with Scots tending to be more sympathetic to recipients of benefits, but also with the wider trend of rising support for welfare that is observed in NatCen data from 2015.

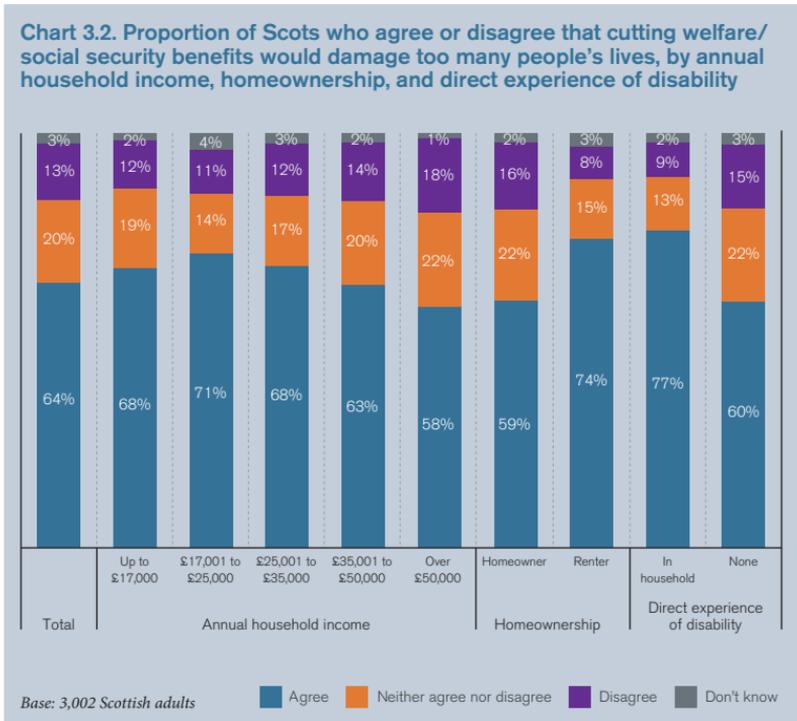
Marked differences do emerge on attitudes towards the generosity of the system when looking at household income, homeownership and direct experience of disability of Scots, as Chart 3.1 below illustrates.



24. British Social Attitudes, "Work and Welfare", http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39254/bsa35_work.pdf, 18

Chart 3.1 above shows Scots who are in the three lower household income groups are less likely to agree that people would be able to support themselves better if benefits were less generous (30%, 27%, and 30% respectively) compared to those in the two highest income groups (38% each).

This difference by household income carried over to some extent into agreement with the question on cutting benefits, as shown in Chart 3.2 below.



While 68% of those in households with income below £17,000 agree that cutting social security would be damaging for too many, this falls to 58% amongst those earning over £50,000.

Despite these differences, it should be noted that across all income groups, there is plurality disagreement with the idea that people would

learn to be self-reliant if social security was less generous, and majority agreement with the idea that cutting social security would be damaging to many people's lives.

Turning to housing status, renters are also considerably less likely (23%) than homeowners (36%) to agree with the idea that if benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to be self-reliant, as shown in Chart 3.1 further above. This discrepancy also applies to some extent to the idea that cutting social security benefits would damage too many people's lives. Whereas around 60% of homeowners agreed with the idea that cutting social security benefits would damage too many people's lives, this figure was markedly higher for renters (74%), as can be seen in Chart 3.2 directly above. In sum, it seems that housing status has a notable bearing on attitudes towards social security: those in rented accommodation are less likely to agree that less generous social security would foster independence among claimants, and more likely to think cutting social security would be damaging.

Another factor that seems to substantially impact on perceptions of social security generosity is direct experience of disability. Our polling shows that respondents with direct experience of disability were considerably more likely to disagree with the idea that if social security benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to be self-reliant, and more likely to agree with idea that cutting social security benefits would damage too many people's lives. Twenty-three percent of those with direct experience of disability agreed with the idea that if social security benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to be self-reliant, compared to 35% of those without such experience. Similarly, a clear majority (77%) of those with direct experience of disability agreed with the idea that cutting social security benefits would damage too many people's lives, compared to a smaller majority (60%) of those without such experience.

In sum, it appears that Scots with lower incomes, who are in the rental housing sector, or have direct experience of disability, are more likely to have more generous views on social security claimants.

Finally, views on social security generosity differed greatly according

to political affiliation, as Chart 3.3 below shows.

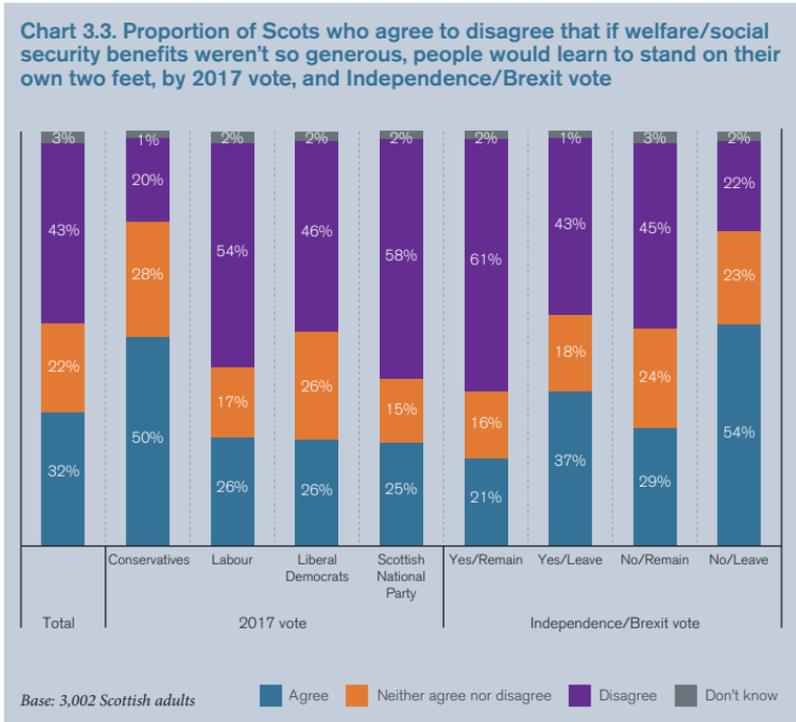
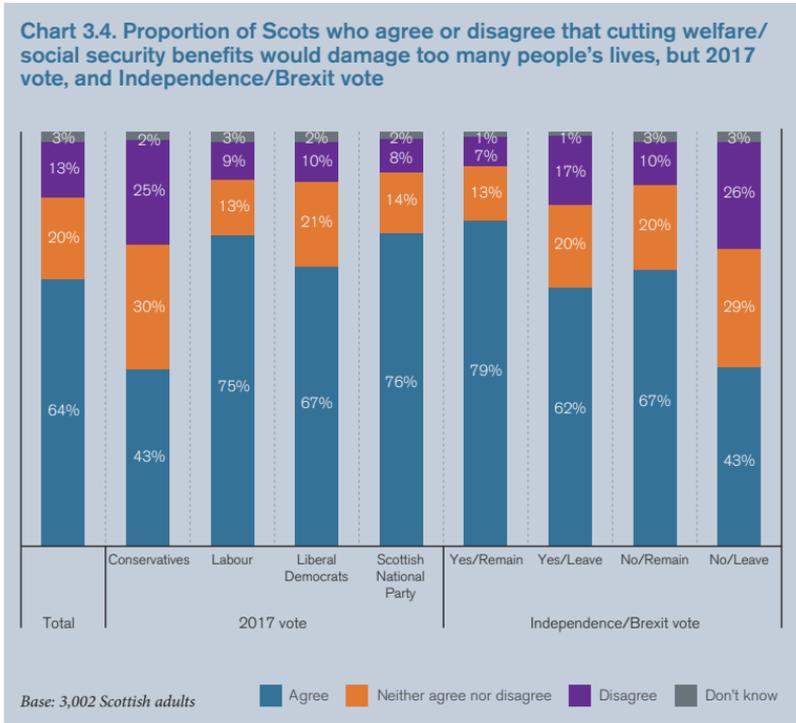


Chart 3.3 illustrates that Scottish Conservative voters were twice as likely to agree that if social security was less generous, people would learn to be self-reliant (50%) in comparison to voters of the other major parties, where around a quarter of whom agree with this statement (26% for Labour voters and 25% for SNP voters).

A similar contrast is seen with No/Leave voters, where a majority agree with the idea if social security was less generous, people would learn to be self-reliant (54%), while all other referendum groups had greater numbers disagreeing than agreeing (37% for Yes/Leave voters, 29% for No/Remain voters, and 21% for Yes/Remain voters).

A similar dynamic emerged for the idea that cutting social security benefits would damage too many people's lives, shown in Chart 3.4 below.



Conservative voters adopt a markedly different stance on social security than voters of any other party. Less than half of Conservative voters (43%) agree that cutting benefits would damage too many people's lives, notably less than supporters of other parties, with a clear majority of Labour (75%) and SNP (76%) voters in agreement. There is an identical pattern with No/Leave voters (43%); they are the only group within which the majority does not agree with the idea that cutting social security would damage too many people's lives. A majority of Yes/Leave voters (62%), No/Remain voters (67%), and Yes/Remain voters (79%) did think cutting benefits would damage too many people's lives.

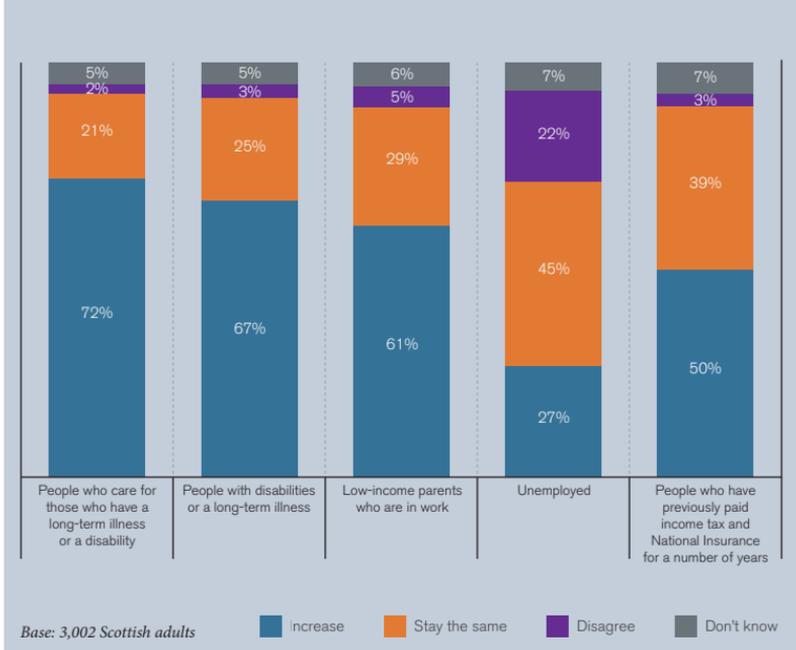
In sum, our polling reveals that Conservative voters and No/Leave voters are much more likely to have less generous views towards those who claim social security.

Levels of support for social security spending

We examined where Scots think social security spending should be directed. Specifically, we asked Scots whether financial support for a range of social groups should increase, decrease, or be maintained at the current level. These groups were: carers; the disabled; low-income parents in work; the unemployed; and, people with a long history of National Insurance (NI) contributions.

There was majority consensus that benefits should increase for all of these groups, other than unemployed people, as seen in Chart 3.5 below. Furthermore, with the exception of unemployed people, there was also very little support for decreases in benefit spending for these groups.

Chart 3.5. Views of Scots on whether government spending on benefits for specific claimant groups should increase, decrease, or stay the same



The group that Scots were most likely to think should have greater support were people who care for those who have a long-term illness

or a disability, with 72% stating that benefit spending on them should increase. Next, Scots were most likely to say that people with a disability or a long-term illness should have an increased level of benefit spending, at 67%.

These figures fall in line with the 2017 findings from NatCen on views about government spending on benefits. NatCen found 78% of UK adults agreed that spending on benefits for carers of those who are sick or disabled should be increased, 67% shared this view on disabled people who cannot find work, and 66% on parents on low incomes, while only 20% agreed in reference to unemployed people.²⁵

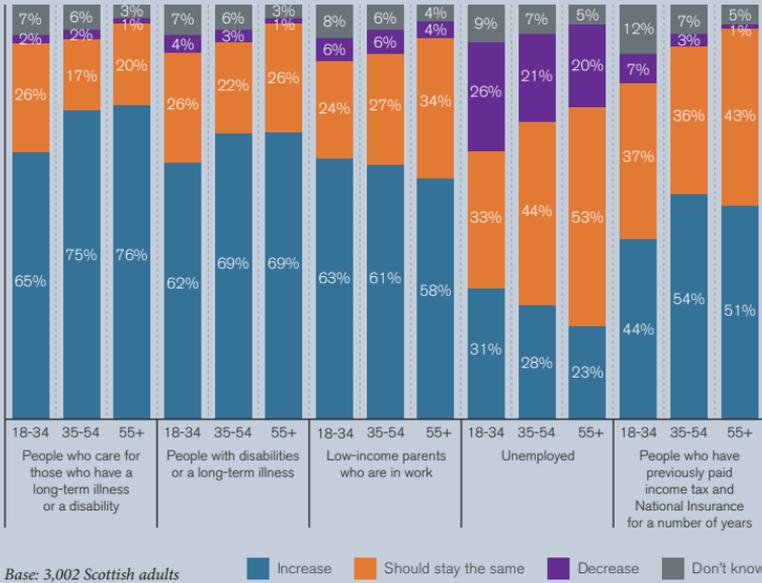
Notably, there was majority support amongst all socio-economic and political groups to increase benefits for the first two groups: those who care for those with long-term illnesses or with disabilities, or people with a long-term illness or a disability. Agreement that low-income working parents and long-term NI contributors should have higher benefits was slightly weaker — at 61% and 50% respectively. The former also found majority support amongst all socio-economic and almost all political groups, with the exception of Conservative voters, a minority (48%) of whom supported the increase. On the other hand, while only 3% wanted to decrease the amount of benefits paid to long-term NI contributors, 39% believed that they should stay the same as now.

The only group where the opinion of Scots was notably divided was on the level of benefits for unemployed people. Around a quarter (27%) felt that benefits for unemployed people should increase, against 22% who thought it should decrease. The most popular option was the status quo: 45% said that benefits for unemployed people should stay the same.

There were modest differences by age on the question of which claimant groups should receive higher benefits or lower benefits. Chart 3.6 below charts the proportion of each age group who answered that benefits should increase or decrease, broken down by claimant group.

25. *Ibid.*, 25.

Chart 3.6. Views of Scots on whether government spending on benefits for specific claimant groups should increase, decrease, or stay the same, by age

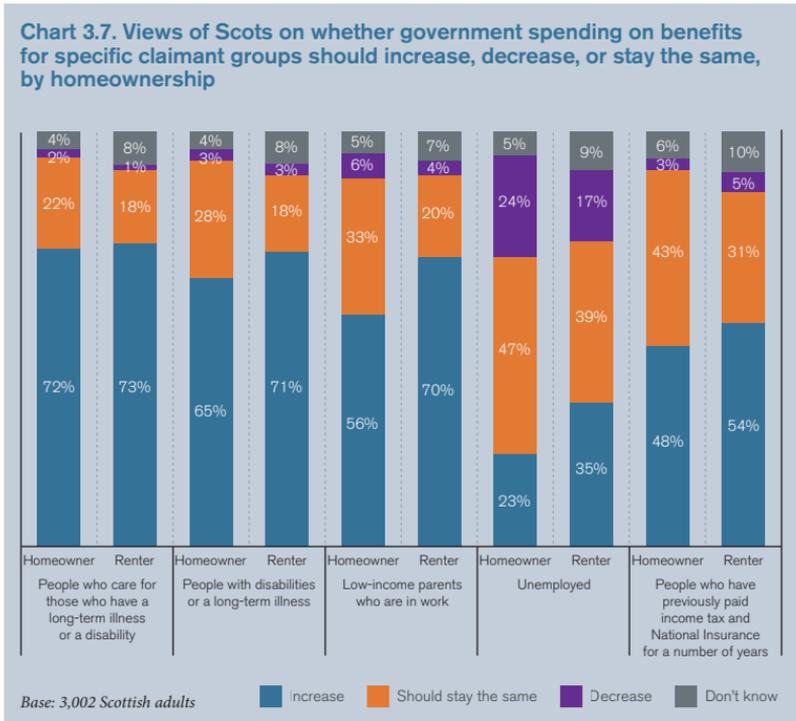


Broadly, support for carers and the disabled having their benefits raised increases moderately with age, by 11 and seven percentage points respectively between those aged 18-34 and over 55. On the other hand, support for increasing benefits for unemployed people falls with age: 31% of 18-34 year olds would support an increase in benefits for this group compared to only 23% of those over 55.

Interestingly, the data shows that there is little disagreement on this question between different household income groups. This is evident when looking at those Scots earning up to £17,000 a year, and earning over £50,000 a year. In the case of every claimant group bar one, there is a small gap in the proportion of respondents who favour an increase in benefits. The exception is unemployed people, for whom 33% of those on up to £17,000 favour increased benefits compared to 22% of those on over £50,000.

On the whole, there is also little difference in how Scots viewed benefit

levels for different claimant groups based on housing status. There were two exceptions to this, however, as Chart 3.7 below demonstrates.



Support for increased social security spending for low-income parents in work is higher among those in rented accommodation, with 70% of renters favouring an increase in benefits for this claimant group compared to only 56% of homeowners, though there is a majority in both groups. Support for increasing benefits for unemployed people similarly falls into two camps: just 23% of homeowners support increasing benefits for this group, compared to a higher proportion (35%) of renters.

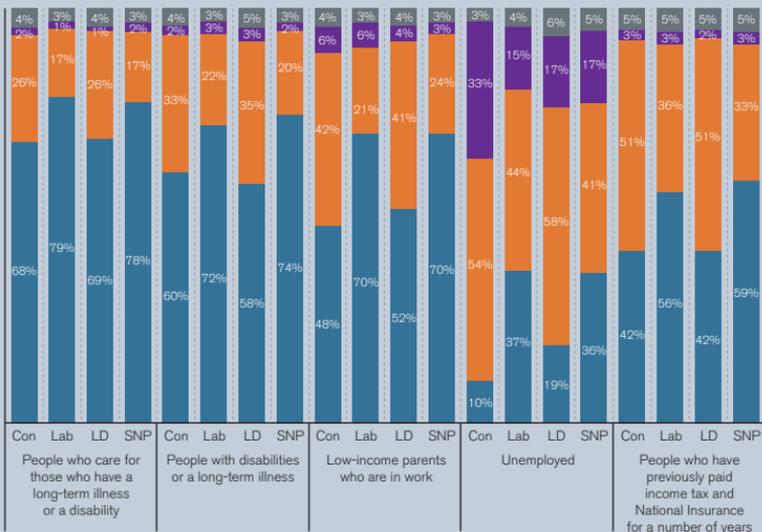
Those with direct experience of disability also tend to be more supportive of increased social security spending for all claimant groups. As expected, this is true for spending on people with disabilities or a long-term illness, where 79% want to see it increased (as opposed to

63% amongst those without direct experience of disability), and also for spending on carers (81% versus 69%), low-income parents in work (69% versus 57%), unemployed (36% versus 23%), and people who have previously paid tax and NI for a number of years (59% versus 47%).

In sum, there are four socio-demographic characteristics which result in frequent or occasional differences in attitudes towards levels of benefits for different claimant groups. Generally, those with direct experience of disability, on lower incomes, and who rent their home are more likely to be supportive of increasing spending on at least some claimant groups, particularly unemployed people, while the effect of age varies for different claimant groups.

There was much stronger variation in support for increased spending on benefits for various claimant groups in terms of previous voting, as seen in Chart 3.8 below.

Chart 3.8. Views of Scots on whether government spending on benefits for specific claimant groups should increase, decrease, or stay about the same, by 2017 vote



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

■ Increase ■ Should stay the same ■ Decrease ■ Don't know

As Chart 3.8 above shows, Scots fell into two broad groups according to party affiliation. Conservatives and Liberal Democrats tended to take a more sceptical stance towards increasing benefits for most claimant groups, while more Labour and SNP supporters supported increasing benefits. In every case, the difference in support between these two groupings was at least ten percentage points. The gap was widest in the case of benefits for unemployed people: only 10% of Conservative voters and 19% of Liberal Democrat voters supported benefit increases for this claimant group, while over 37% of Labour and 36% of SNP voters favoured a rise.

This divide in attitudes was also apparent in Scottish Independence and Brexit past voting, as Chart 3.9 below demonstrates.

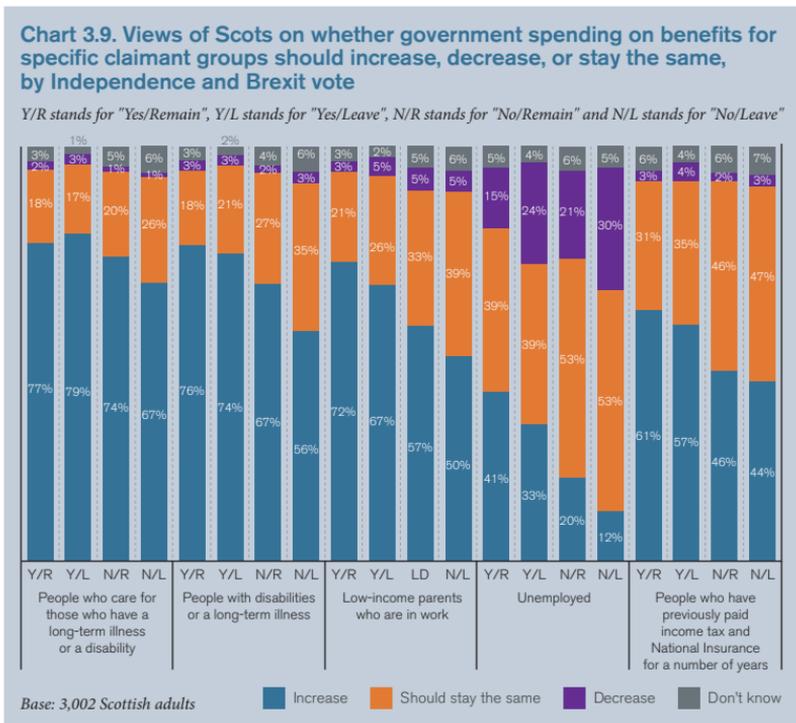


Chart 3.9 demonstrates that Yes/Remain (Y/R) and Yes/Leave (Y/L)

voters were most likely to support increasing levels of benefits for all five claimant groups, followed by No/Remain voters (N/R), and then by No/Leave voters (N/L), who were least likely to support increases. The greatest difference was observed in the case of benefits for unemployed people, with only 12% of No/Leave voters supporting an increase, in contrast to 41% of Yes/Remain voters.

In sum, voting history did have an impact on how Scots perceived the level of benefits that should be granted to different types of claimant groups. But it is important to stress that across all socio-demographic and political groups, a plurality supported increasing the level of benefits to all claimant groups, except for unemployed people.

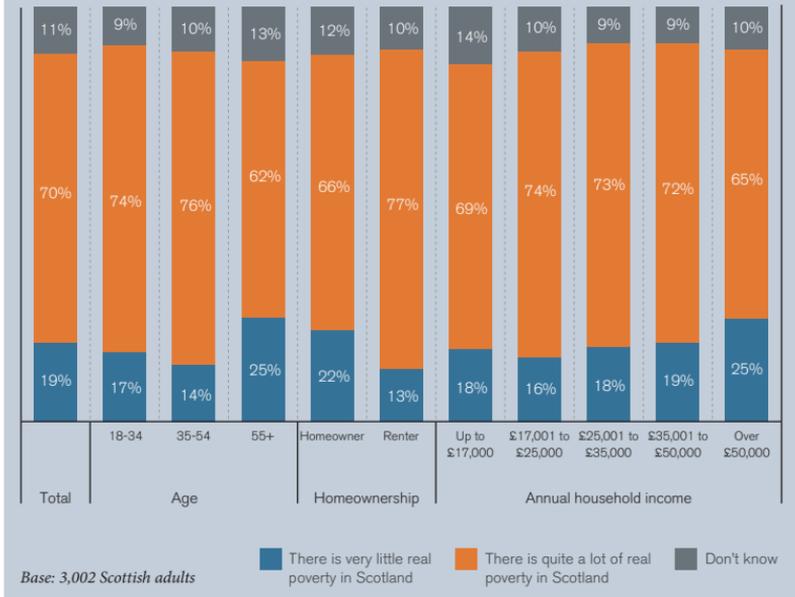
Perceptions of poverty in Scotland

Finally, we tested the views of Scots towards levels of poverty in Scotland. Overall, Scots perceive high levels of poverty. Seventy percent agree that there is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland. With UK-wide polling in 2018 finding that 65% of respondents thought that there was quite a lot poverty in Britain today,²⁶ our findings are in line with expectations that Scots are slightly more concerned about issues of poverty and social security relative to the rest of the UK.

In our polling, a majority take this view in almost every socio-demographic group. This is shown in Chart 3.10 below.

26. British Social Attitudes 36, "Poverty and inequality", http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39288/6_bsa36_poverty-and-inequality.pdf (2018), 11.

Chart 3.10. Proportion of Scots who think there is very little real poverty in Scotland today, by age, homeownership, and annual household income

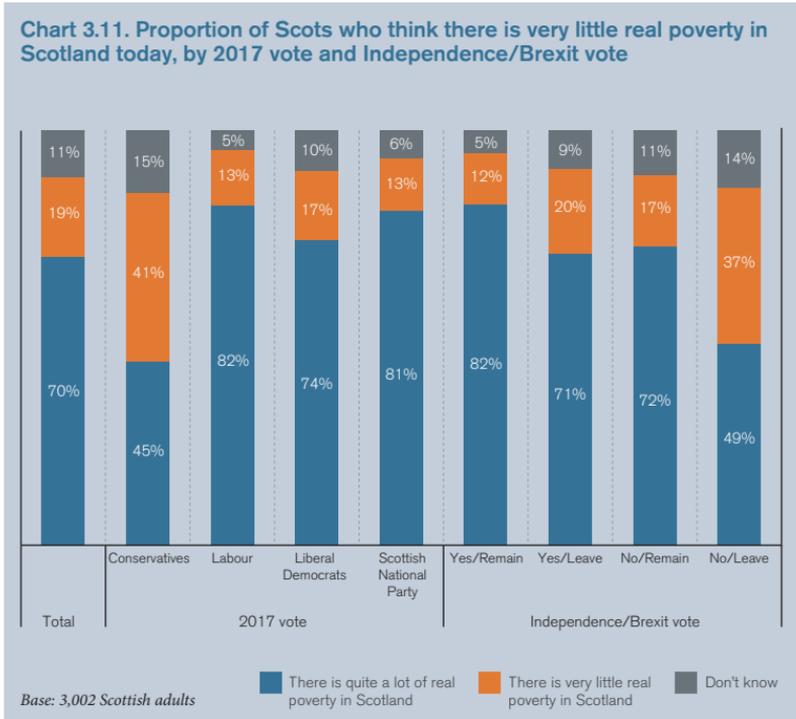


There are, however, notable differences by age group, as shown in Chart 3.10 above. Agreement that there is a lot of poverty in Scotland falls from 74% and 76% amongst those aged 18-34 and 35-54, to 62% in the 55+ age group.

Housing status also has a notable impact on attitudes towards levels of poverty in Scotland. Perception of poverty is stronger among renters than among homeowners: 77% of renters consider there to be quite a lot of poverty in Scotland, while only 66%, albeit still a majority, of homeowners agree. Similarly, those with direct experience of disability were also more likely to believe that there is quite a lot of poverty in Scotland (77%), in comparison to those who do not have such experience (67%).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the previously reported results from our polling, there was a distinct divide in terms of party affiliation, as Chart 3.11 below demonstrates. Conservative voters do not perceive there

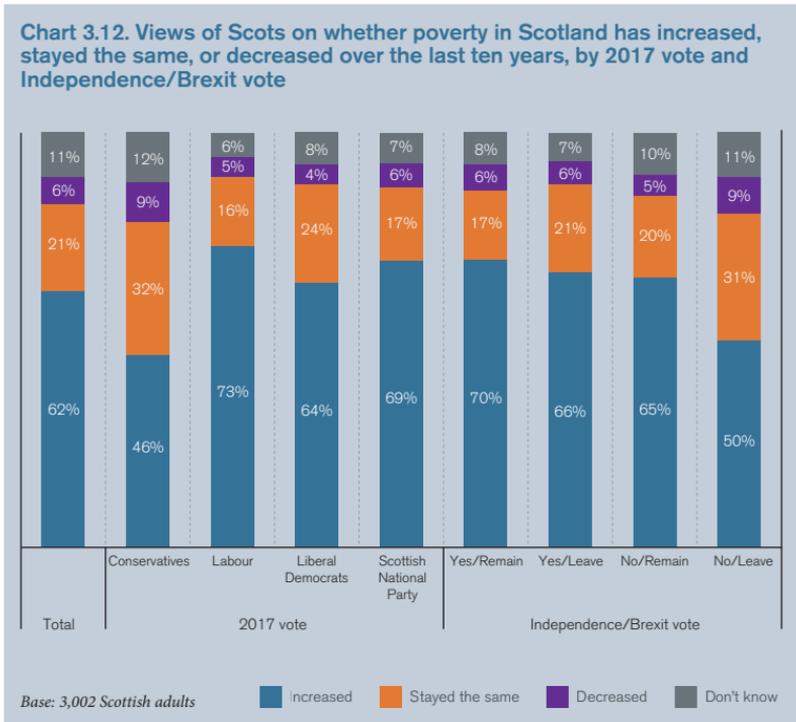
to be as much poverty and are more split, relative to other voters, with only 45% thinking that there is quite a lot of real poverty. Meanwhile, 82% of Labour and 81% of SNP voters think that there is quite a lot of real poverty.



No/Leave voters are the only major referendum demographic where a majority does not believe that there is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland (49%), while all other referendum subgroups overwhelmingly believe that there is: Yes/Remain voters (82%); Yes/Leave voters (71%); and No/Remain voters (72%).

We also asked Scots whether they think that poverty in Scotland has risen over the past decade — a judgement, in some part, on the effectiveness of the social security system since 2010. As Chart 3.12 below shows, there is a perception that poverty has risen, with 62% of Scots believing that poverty has increased over the last ten years. This

falls in line with UK-wide perceptions of increases in poverty, where 62% of respondents in 2018 also expressed that it has increased in the last ten years.²⁷ In our polling, there is a consistent majority of Scots across all socio-demographic groups that think this is the case, with little variation.



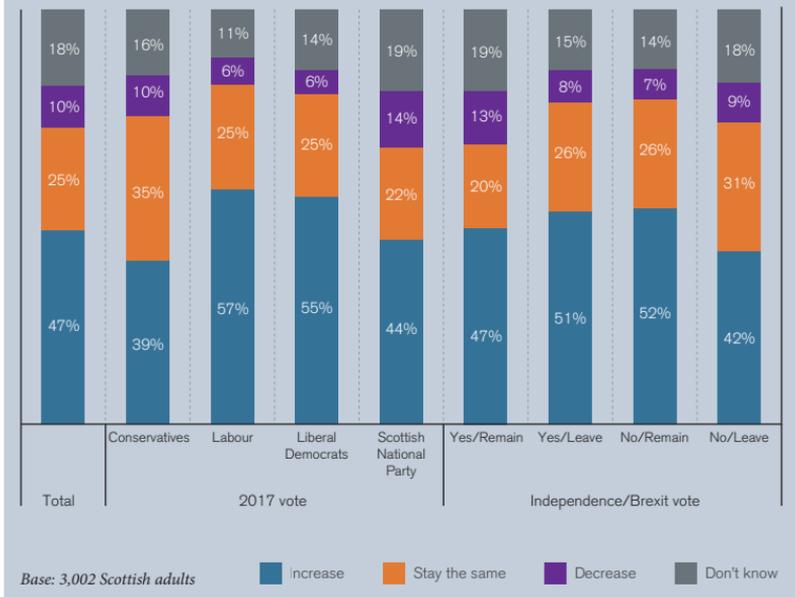
There is more disagreement when examining the views of different types of voters on trends in poverty over the past ten years, as demonstrated in Chart 3.12 above. Conservatives are the least likely to believe that poverty has increased in the last ten years (46%), though this is still a plurality view. In contrast, a majority of Labour (73%), Liberal Democrat (64%), and SNP (69%) voters believe that poverty has increased in the last ten years.

27. British Social Attitudes 36, “Poverty and inequality”, http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39288/6_bsa36_poverty-and-inequality.pdf (2018), 11.

Similarly, while large majorities of Yes/Remain voters (70%), Yes/Leave voters (66%), and No/Remain voters (65%) thought poverty has increased in the last ten years, this fell to 50% of No/Leave voters.

Thinking about the future, fewer Scots are pessimistic about the state of poverty in the future, with just under half (47%) thinking poverty will increase further over the next ten years. This is notably less than what has been observed in UK-wide polling in 2018, where 61% believed that poverty levels will increase over the next ten years.²⁸ Once again, there are no major socio-economic divides in our polling, with almost all social groups believing that poverty will increase either by a plurality or a small majority.

Chart 3.13. Views of Scots on whether, over the next 10 years, poverty in Scotland will increase, stay the same, or decrease, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



28. British Social Attitudes 36, “Poverty and inequality”, http://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/media/39288/6_bsa36_poverty-and-inequality.pdf (2018), 11.

As Chart 3.13 above indicates, there is a smaller divide between the political groups, with Conservative (39%) and SNP voters (44%) being less likely to think that poverty will increase in comparison to Labour (57%) and Liberal Democrat voters (55%). This is one of the very few questions where SNP voters hold a view closer to the Conservatives than Labour voters, potentially due to SNP currently being in power in Scotland, leading to some SNP voters having higher expectations of the future. It could also indicate more optimistic views of the effect of current SNP Government interventions.

The differences are even smaller across the referendum divisions, with No/Leave voters (42%) being slightly less likely to believe that poverty will increase in the next ten years compared to Yes/Remain voters (47%), Yes/Leave voters (51%), and No/Remain voters (52%).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Scots do not think that the social security system is too generous. A majority also believe that any further cuts will be damaging and that spending for many claimant groups should be increased, with the notable exception of people who are unemployed. These views seem to be at least in part fuelled by perceptions of quite high levels of real poverty in the country, and the widespread belief that poverty levels have increased in the past ten years and are likely to continue to increase.

The most major variation on views on social security was by voting group. In particular, Conservative voters stood out: compared to supporters of other parties, they were twice as likely to think that lower social security would encourage more personal responsibility, consistently less supportive of higher benefits for different claimant groups, and notably more upbeat on the state of poverty in Scotland. No/Leave voters, who strongly overlap with Conservative voters, held very similar views.

In contrast, differences between socio-demographic groups were much smaller. There were four notable exceptions to this: housing status, age,

household income, and direct experience of disability. Considering that people on lower incomes, renters and disabled people are much more likely to encounter the social security system directly, the difference in views along these socio-demographic lines is not surprising.

Throughout, people with a direct experience of disability and renters had a notably distinct view on social security. They were: much less likely to believe that if social security was less generous people would learn to stand on their own two feet; more likely to support higher benefits for each claimant group; and, more likely to agree that there is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland.

Age featured less prominently, with younger and older respondents having only slightly distinct priorities when it came to which claimant groups should receive higher benefits. While those over the age of 55 were more likely than those under 35 to support raising the benefits of carers and the disabled, those under 35 were more likely to support higher unemployment benefits.

Finally, household income only had a substantial effect on views on levels of benefits for different claimants: there was a small drop in support for higher levels of benefits for different claimant groups towards the top of the income distribution (£35,000 and above), while those on low incomes tending to share the views of those on middle incomes.

The next chapter explores attitudes of Scots towards the newly devolved social security system that is gradually being introduced.

Chapter 4: The devolved social security system

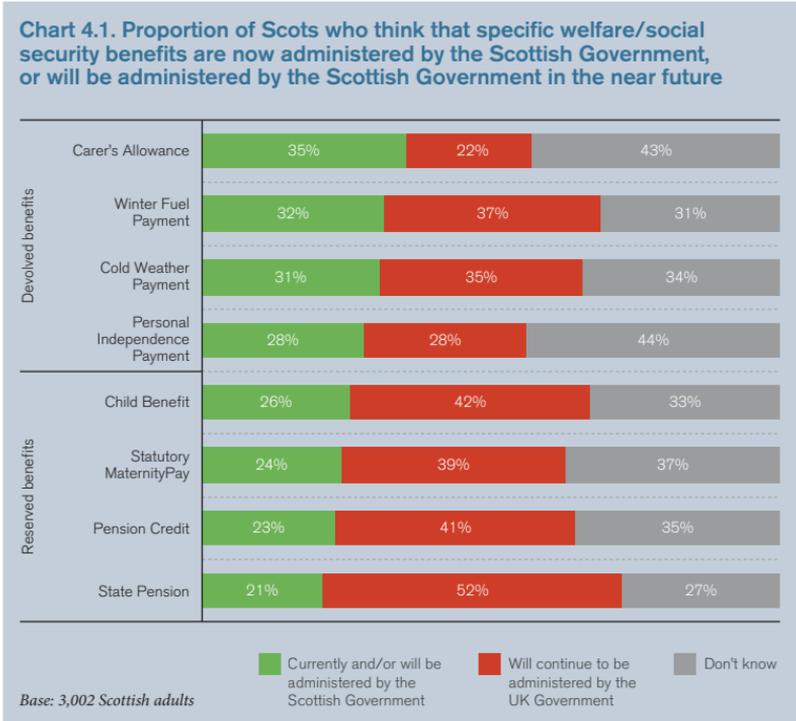
Having established the broad attitudes to the purpose and effectiveness of the social security system, this chapter unearths the attitudes of Scots towards the devolved social security system that is gradually being introduced. First, we investigate Scots' knowledge of the extent of the devolution of social security, and whether they think devolution of social security should go further. Second, we examine public preferences on devolved social security spending budgets and funding sources. Third, we scrutinise which principles Scots felt should or should not apply to the devolved social security system.

Knowledge of devolution

Before testing attitudes towards the scale of devolution, and the views and principles behind a devolved social security system, we first wanted to uncover the level of knowledge about the extent of devolution on social security matters. As Chapter One described, the Scottish Parliament has received full control over 11 benefits, totalling £3.5 billion in yearly payments once the transfer of responsibility to SSS is complete.

Scots were asked about the devolution status of eight different benefits. Of the eight benefits, four have been devolved to Holyrood or are due to be: Carer's Allowance; Personal Independence Payments; Winter Fuel Payment; and, Cold Weather Payment. We picked four well-known benefits that are not and are not planned to be devolved to Holyrood: Statutory

Maternity Pay, Child Benefit, Pension Credit and State Pension. Knowledge of devolution of these eight benefits is shown in Chart 4.1 below.



Many Scots are unsure as to what benefits are devolved to Holyrood and which remain administered by Westminster, as Chart 4.1 above clearly illustrates. For every benefit that Scots were polled on, more than 30% of respondents did not know if the benefit had been devolved or not, except for state pension (27%).

Scots are more likely to erroneously believe that Winter Fuel Payments has not been devolved (32% versus 37%). The same is true of Cold Weather Payments; 31% versus 35% of Scots incorrectly believe that this benefit will continue to be administered by the UK Government. Scots are split — 28% versus 28% — as to whether or not Personal Independence Payments have been devolved, which it will be. The only devolved benefit that a plurality of

Scots accurately stated as such is Carer's Allowance (35% to 22%).

Those who voted 'Yes' in the Scottish Independence referendum are more likely than those who voted 'No' to correctly assert that Winter Fuel Payments (41% versus 23%), Cold Weather Payments (41% versus 22%), Personal Independence Payments (34% versus 24%) and Carer's Allowance (43% versus 30%) have all been devolved. However, those who voted 'Yes' in the independence referendum are more likely than those who voted 'No' to incorrectly state that Statutory Maternity Pay, Child Benefit, Pension Credit, and State Pension, which have not been devolved to Scotland, have been. This trend could be indicative of how partisanship is potentially driving answers to such questions, with some people describing matters they want to be true to actually be true.

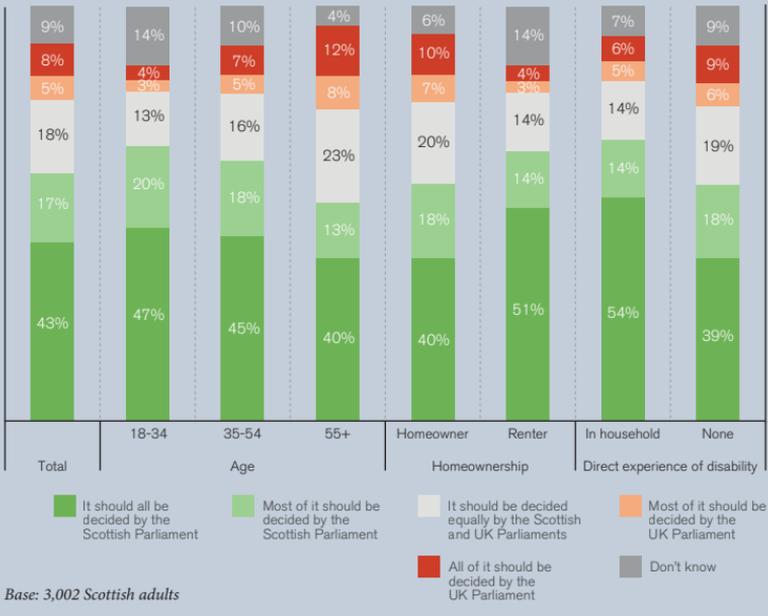
Two factors which appear to influence the likelihood of accurate knowledge of the status of a benefit are personal experience of that benefit, and how recent its devolution has been. For example, those in households with direct experience of disability are more likely (41%) to accurately state that Carer's Allowance has been devolved to the Scottish Government than those without any such experience (33%).

Scottish carers have already started receiving Carer's Allowance Supplement from the Scottish Government in September 2018, leading to people having a direct experience of the devolved system. In contrast, knowledge of Personal Independence Payment, the replacement for which is only being administered by the Scottish Government from 2020, is poorer. Only 28% of Scots correctly state that the benefit is due to be devolved, with 44% stating that they do not know. The same is true of Winter Fuel Payment, which will only be practically devolved by the end of 2021. A plurality of Scots (37%) incorrectly believe that this benefit will be continued to be administered by Westminster.

Extent of devolution

Scots were then polled on whether social security should be totally, partly or not at all decided by the UK Parliament or the Scottish Parliament. The results are shown in Chart 4.2 below.

Chart 4.2. Views of Scots on the extent to which welfare/social security policy in Scotland should be decided by the Scottish and UK parliaments by age, homeownership and direct experience of disability

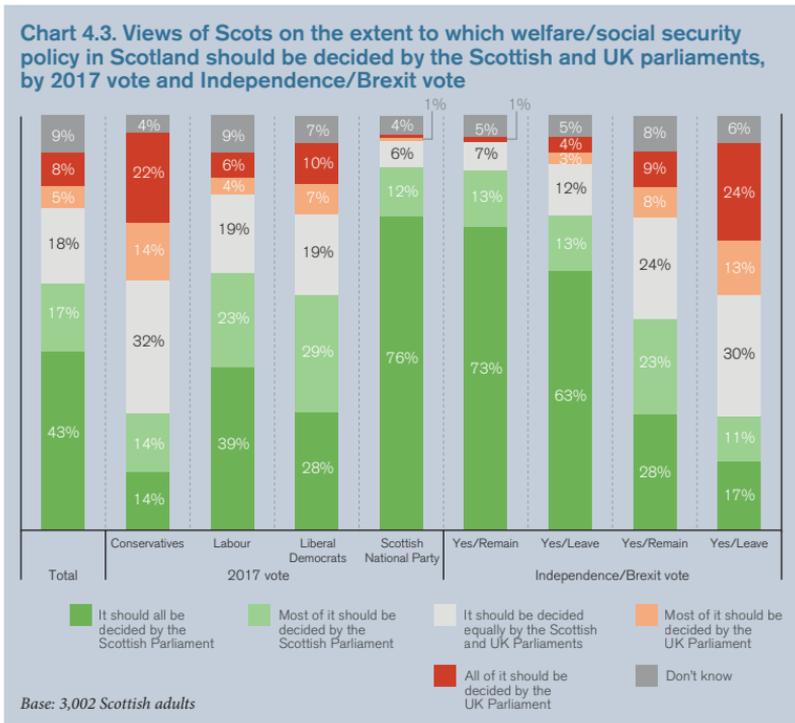


The majority of Scots think that social security should be a devolved matter, with support holding across almost all socio-demographic divides. Sixty percent of Scots believe that social security should be mostly decided by Holyrood. In contrast, a mere 8% of Scots believe that social security should be wholly administered by Westminster and a further 5% believe the system should be partly administered by Westminster. Only 18% of Scots believe that the social security system should be decided equally between Holyrood and Westminster

Support for further devolution of social security varied slightly by socio-demographic groups. Renters — 51% of them — are most likely to support absolute devolution of social security versus homeowners, where only 40% support full devolution. Scots with a direct experience of disability are the socio-demographic group most likely (55%) to support complete devolution of social security to Scotland. In contrast,

only 39% of those without any direct experience of disability support complete devolution of social security.

That most or all social security responsibility should be devolved to Scotland is a popular idea, finding majority support amongst all voting groups bar two, as shown in Chart 4.3 below.

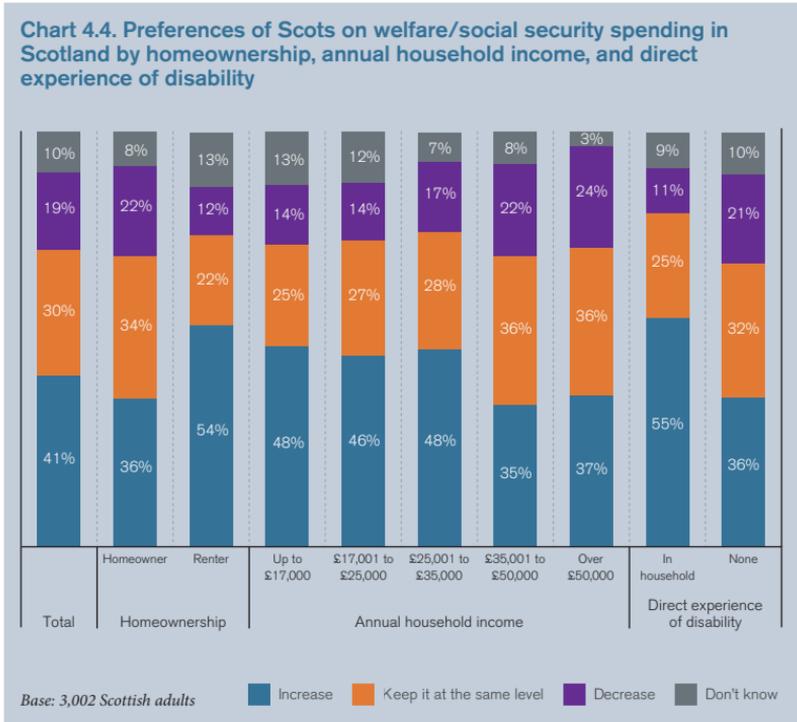


As can be seen, Conservatives (29%) and No/Leave voters (27%) are the only two groups where only a minority support full or partial devolution of the social security system. Even those who voted against Scottish Independence are more likely to support the idea that most or all social security should be administered by Holyrood rather than Westminster (43% versus 23%).

Social security spending

Considering Chapter Three's findings, which show that a majority of Scots

believe that cutting benefits would be damaging, it is of little surprise that a minority (19%) of Scots would like to see spending on social security specifically in Scotland reduced, as shown in Chart 4.4 below. In contrast, 41% of Scots want to see an increase in the spend on social security in Scotland, making this the most popular option, and a further 30% believe that spending should simply remain at its current level.

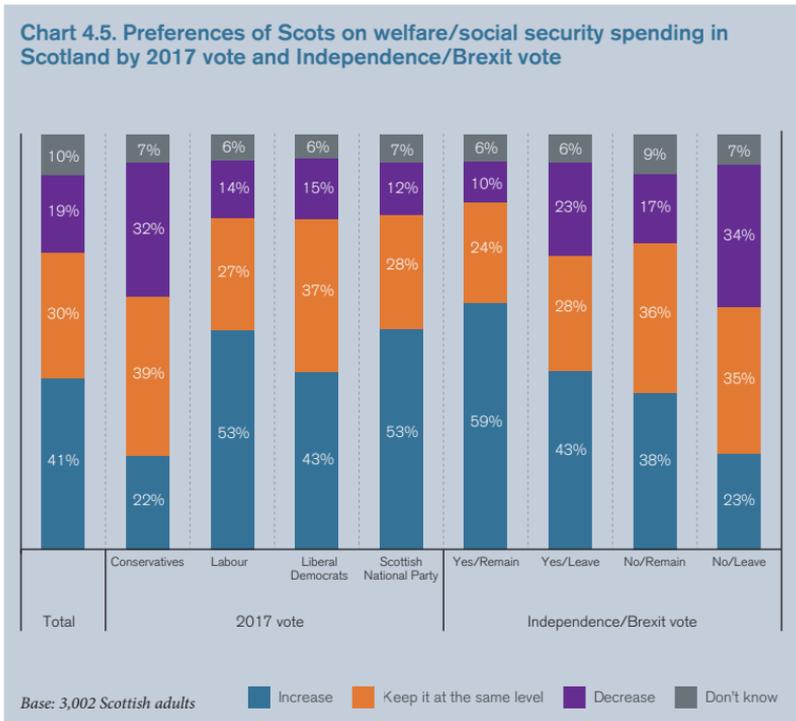


However, as Chart 4.4 above demonstrates, Scots' attitudes on levels of spending on Scottish social security vary by certain key socio-demographic characteristics. Scots who enjoy a higher level of financial and housing security are less likely to support an increase in spending on social security than those who are less secure. Only a minority of homeowners (36%) support increased spending on Scottish social security in contrast to a majority (54%) of renters. Similarly, 37% of those

in households earning more than £50,000 support an increase in social security spending versus nearly half of Scots (48%) in households who earn £17,000 or less, with this level of public support being similar across the bottom three groups of household income levels for this survey.

Scots with direct experience of disability are more likely to support an increase in spending on Scottish social security. A majority (55%) of Scots with direct experience of disability support this spending increase in Scotland versus a minority (36%) of those who are not disabled or have no experience of it in their household.

As Chart 4.5 proves, support for an increase in spending on Scottish social security is clearly demarcated along political lines.



The most likely voters to support a decrease in social security spending are Conservative voters (32%). SNP and Labour voters are the

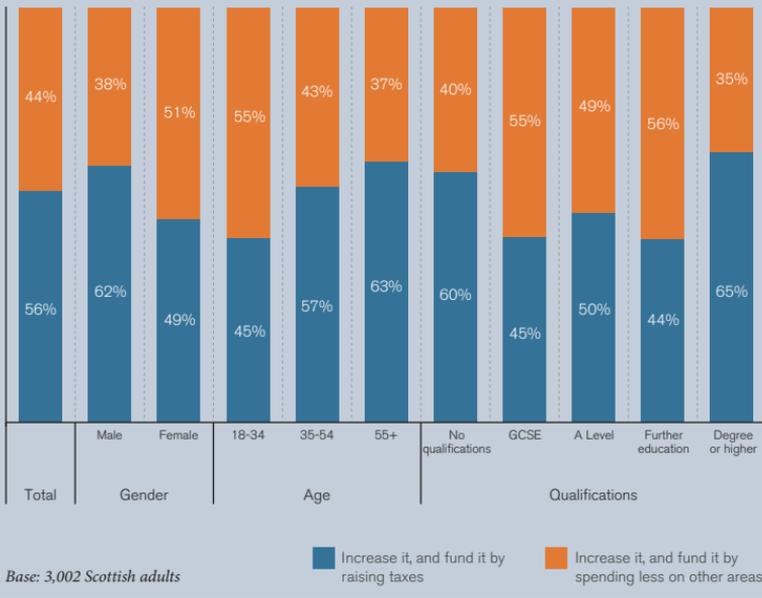
least likely to support decreasing Scottish social security spending; 12% and 14% respectively. However, Conservatives are in fact the most likely (39%) voters to support Scottish social security spending remaining at its current level, followed by Liberal Democrats (37%). Actually, this is the most popular option — keeping Scottish social security spending at the same level — for Conservatives. While notable minorities of SNP (28%) and Labour (27%) voters also want to see spending remain at current levels, the majority of their voters want to see it increased (53% amongst each group).

‘Yes’ and Remain voters and ‘No’ and Leave voters are each closely aligned in their attitude to Scottish social security spending, as Chart 4.5 above indicates. ‘Yes’ Scots are more likely (54%) to support increased spending than those who voted ‘No’ (32%). Similarly, Remain voters are more likely (48%) to support increased spending than Leave voters (31%). Thus, the political group most likely to think that spending on social security should be increased is Yes/Remain voters (59%). The political group least likely to support increased spending on social security is No/Remain voters (38%),

Having established that Scots, albeit not a majority, are most likely to want to see a Scottish social security spending increase, we investigated attitudes amongst those who were supportive of increased spending towards how any such increases could be financed.

As Chart 4.6 below signifies, there is no clear agreement on how any such increase in Scottish social security spending should be funded among those who support increasing it.

Chart 4.6. Views of Scots who want to see welfare/social security spending increase on how those increases should be funded, by gender, age, and qualifications



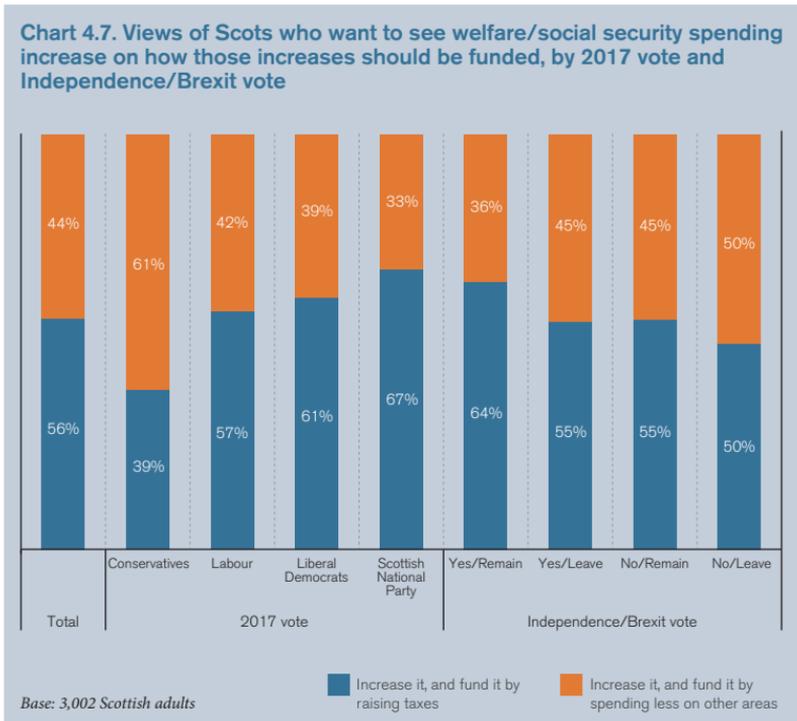
Presented with two options through which to increase social security spending — by raising taxes or by spending less on other areas — Scots in favour of increased social security spending are divided. Of all Scottish adults who support increasing social security funding, a slight majority (56%) are in favour of using tax rises to do so, and a small proportion (44%) would like to see that increase in spending be funded by savings generated from reductions in other budgets.

Though there is a majority for increasing social security spending via tax rises, variation on where the funding for this extra spending should come emerges clearly by age, gender and education. Older Scots who support higher social security spending are most likely to support increased social security spending that is funded by tax rises: a majority (63%) of those aged over 55 supported this funding method versus a minority (48%) of those aged between 18 and 34 years. Furthermore, while 62% of men

who want higher social security spending support raising taxes, this falls to 49% amongst women who support higher spending. Graduates are also more likely to support higher social security spending funded by tax rises, with a majority (65%) of graduates supporting this funding method versus 48% of non-graduates who want higher social security spending.

Spending less on other areas finds its greatest levels of support amongst those aged 18-34, with a majority (55%) of this age group who wanted higher Scottish social security spending, supporting this funding method versus 37% of those aged above 55.

Again, there is major variation by voting history among Scots wanting higher public spending on social security, as Chart 4.7 below indicates.



It should be noted that while only 22% of Conservatives want to increase spending, this group is still distinct from Labour and SNP

voters in how that spending should be financed. Only 39% of such Conservative voters want to increase spending through greater taxes, while 57% of Labour and 67% of SNP voters who want higher social security spending in Scotland support utilising this method. A clear majority of these Conservatives (61%) think that higher social security spending should be funded by cuts elsewhere. Similarly, Yes/Remain voters who want greater spending on social security are more likely to support increasing taxation (64%) than similar No/Leave voters (50%).

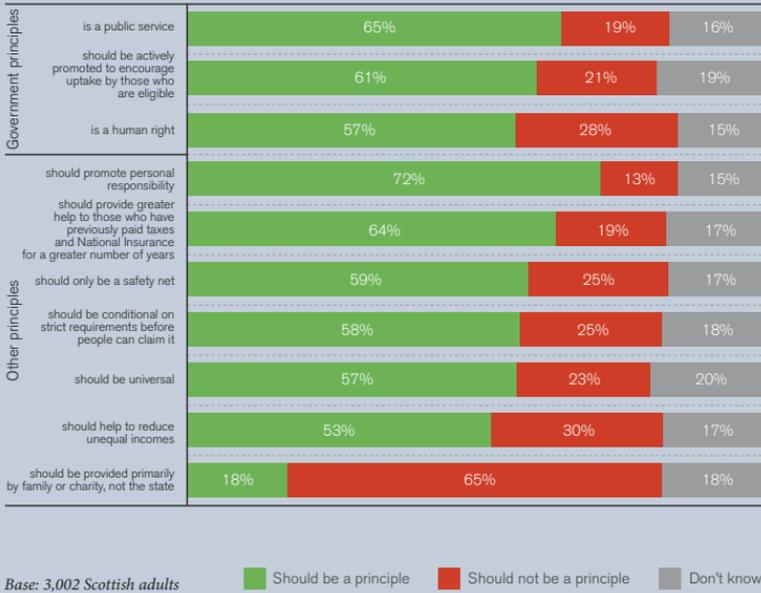
Principles of the Scottish social security system

We tested what Scots thought the main principles of the Scottish Social Security system should be.

Scotland's social security system has eight principles, which are provided by the Scottish Social Security Charter. As outlined in Chapter One, a number of these principles were introduced to address the perceived deficiencies with the approach of the UK's DWP by emphasising the rights of the claimants and the responsibilities of the involved agency.

Of the eight principles of the Charter, Scots were polled on three for this survey that marked the most significant departure from DWP's approach: that social security is a human right; that its delivery is a public service; and, that those who are entitled to benefits should be encouraged to take them up. We have also added a number of other well-known principles from across the political spectrum, especially from the centre-right, to test alternative principles that Scots could potentially support. The results are seen in Chart 4.8 below.

Chart 4.8. Views of Scots on specific principles which should or should not apply to the Scottish welfare/social security system



First, it should be noted that a wide range of principles received majority support from Scots, with the principle of personal responsibility (72%) being the most popular out of the ones that we have polled.

Specifically focussing on the principles already advocated by the Scottish Government and introduced in the Scottish Social Security Charter, there is a majority of 57% for the principle that provision of the social security system in Scotland constitutes a human right. This principle secures majority support amongst all socio-demographic groups, with the largest difference observed between those with direct experience of disability (66%) and those who do not (54%). Amongst political groups, only Conservatives (39% supporting and 48% opposing) and No/Leave voters (39% supporting and 49% opposing) have greater levels of opposition than support for the principle.

There is also majority support (65%) for the principle that the delivery of social security in Scotland is a public service, with all socio-demographic and voting groups also expressing majority support.

On the flipside, only a minority (18%) of Scots believe that social security in Scotland should be provided primarily by family or charity, rather than by government, making this the least popular principle we have polled by a significant margin. There is also majority opposition to this principle amongst all socio-demographic and voting groups. This highlights that most Scots believe that the state should continue to play the central role in provision of social security in Scotland.

As noted above, the principle of promotion of personal responsibility attracts majority support in total (72%) and across all socio-economic and political divides, though there are variations within the levels of support.

Those who are less financially secure are relatively less likely to agree that promotion of personal responsibility should be a principle of the Scottish social security system, with 59% support amongst those in low-income households, in contrast to 82% amongst those in households earning over £50,000. Homeowners are also more likely to support this principle than those who rent — 75% versus 64%, while those between 18-34 are less likely to support (66%) than those over 55 (77%).

The most likely political group to support the personal responsibility principle are Scottish Conservative voters at 83%, and the least likely political group to express support SNP voters at 68%, though even here there is a notable majority support for the personal responsibility principle. Similarly, while Yes/Remain voters are the least likely (67%) to support this principle, a notable majority still do.

Other principles commonly associated with centre-right philosophy that have majority support of Scots are that the social security system should only be a safety net, at 59%, and that it should be conditional on strict requirements before people can claim it, at 58%. Once again, it is notable that both of these principles have at least plurality support

amongst all socio-demographic groups, with the lowest level of support being amongst low-income households, where 46% support the idea that it should be conditional on strict requirements and that it should only be a safety net.

While these principles also attract greater support from politically conservative groups, there is a wide base of support. While large majorities of Scottish Conservative voters support the safety net principle (76%) and the strict conditional requirements principle (80%), there is also majority support among SNP voters (50% and 53% respectively), and there is plurality support amongst all other voting groups for both of these principles.

The principle that the social security system should provide greater help for those who have previously paid taxes and National Insurance for a greater number of years receives majority support overall (64%), and amongst all socio-demographic and voting groups. Though Conservatives (73%) are the most likely to express support, SNP voters are not far behind at 62%, highlighting desire for greater reciprocity in the Scottish social security system. However, with National Insurance remaining a reserved matter, there are clear limitations to the ability of the Scottish Government to pursue this unilaterally.

Finally, it should be noted that there is also majority support for the principle that social security should be used to help reduce unequal incomes: 53% of Scots support this principle and 30% do not, with support being greater than opposition amongst all socio-demographic groups and amongst most voting groups, with the exception of Conservative and No/Leave voters. Support for redistribution is notable, considering that this goes significantly beyond the remit of the majority of social security systems, including the principles of the Scottish social security system.

The polling on principles demonstrates that many Scots hold, to some extent, conflicting beliefs about the principles that should underpin and inform the Scottish social security system. There is majority support amongst Scots for the principles that have been

introduced by the Scottish Government that we have polled, including the principle of social security being a human right. There is also a majority support for the principle of using social security to help reduce unequal incomes, which goes beyond the legislation that the SNP Government passed with cross-party support.

However, there is also majority support for the principle that the social security system should only act as a safety net, that it should be conditional on strict requirements before people can claim it, and that greater help should be provided to those who have previously paid taxes and National Insurance for a greater number of years. This shows that principles commonly associated with the centre-right also have broad and major levels of support.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown knowledge of the new devolution settlement on social security is relatively low, with many not knowing about the benefits that have been devolved or holding erroneous views. There is also a notable level of support for greater devolution of social security, with a majority of Scots wishing to see most or all such policy being devolved.

There is a major and notable appetite for greater spending on social security in Scotland, though many are also satisfied with current levels. Amongst those who wish for it to increase, there is a prominent split in views, with a slightly higher proportion half wishing to fund it by raising taxes, while a large minority would prefer spending less on other policy areas.

The polling has shown that Scots hold partly conflicting opinions on the nature of the principles that should underpin the Scottish social security system. There is majority Scottish support for all the principles encapsulated in the relevant legislation and reflected in the Scottish Social Security Charter, such as social security being a human right and being a public service, but also majority support for principles commonly associated with the centre-right, with the principle

emphasising personal responsibility being the most popular that we have polled.

Views on devolution, social security spending, and principles could easily be demarcated along political lines. However, the picture is nuanced. Even Conservative voters were supportive of at least some devolution of social security and were more likely to want social security spending to remain at current levels than decrease. There was also widespread support for social security principles commonly associated with the centre-right amongst left-of-centre voters.

The next chapter explores attitudes of Scots to various aspects of Universal Credit, including the changes introduced both by the UK and Scottish Parliaments.

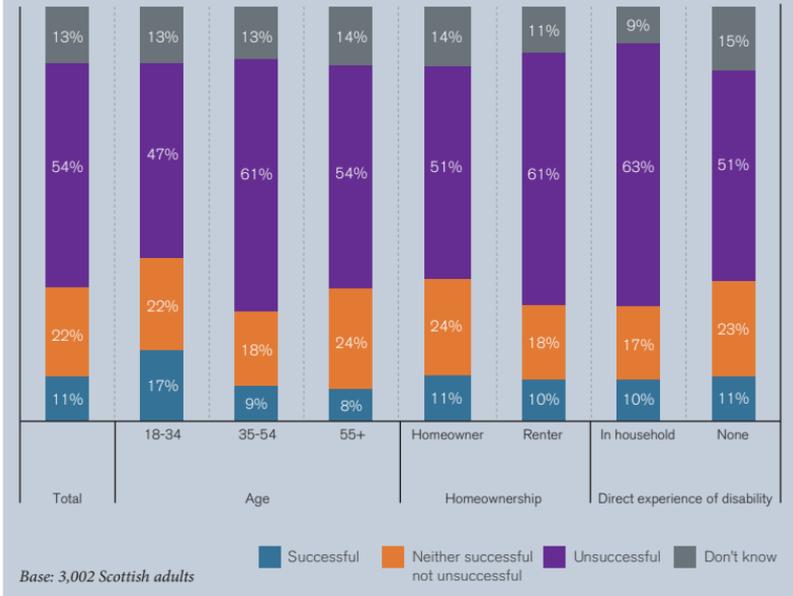
Chapter 5: Attitudes to Universal Credit

Having looked at public attitudes to the gradual devolution of the Scottish social security system in the previous chapter, this chapter examines the attitudes of Scots towards the recently introduced UK-wide Universal Credit. This includes examination of the new conditionality and sanctioning rules that were brought in alongside Universal Credit, and the new policies that are being introduced by the Scottish Government through the Scottish Choices scheme to address some of the perceived shortcomings of Universal Credit.

Perceptions of Universal Credit

Overall, general perceptions of Universal Credit are notably negative, as Chart 5.1 below demonstrates, with a majority of Scots (54%) describing the introduction of this UK-wide benefit as unsuccessful.

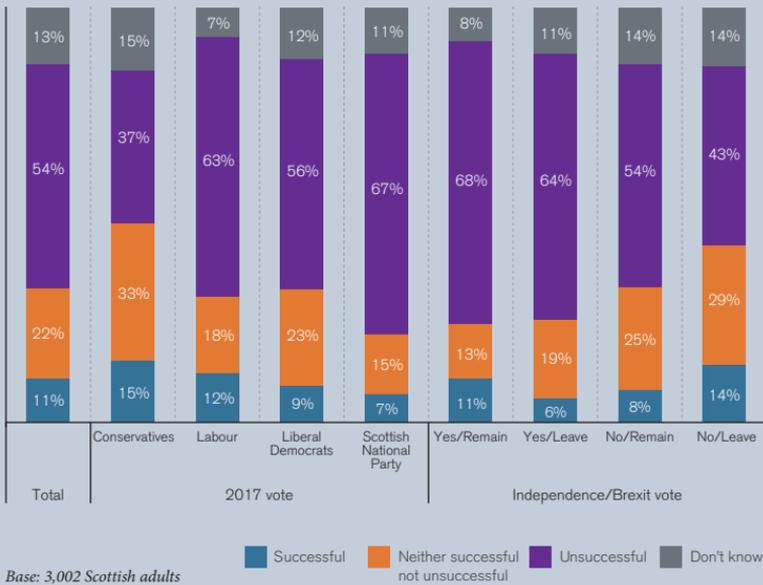
Chart 5.1. Views of Scots on whether the introduction of Universal Credit was successful, by age, homeownership, and direct experience of disability



As Chart 5.1 above shows, while a majority of people are sceptical about Universal Credit across almost all key socio-demographic characteristics, renters (61%) and those with direct experience of disability in their household (63%) are more likely to hold this opinion than homeowners (51%) and those without a direct experience of disability (51%). Interestingly, those aged between 18-34 are relatively more likely to describe it as a success (17%), and one of the few groups where less than half describe it as unsuccessful.

Perceptions of Universal Credit also vary notably between voting groups, as Chart 5.2 below illustrates.

Chart 5.2. Views of Scots on whether the introduction of Universal Credit was successful, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote

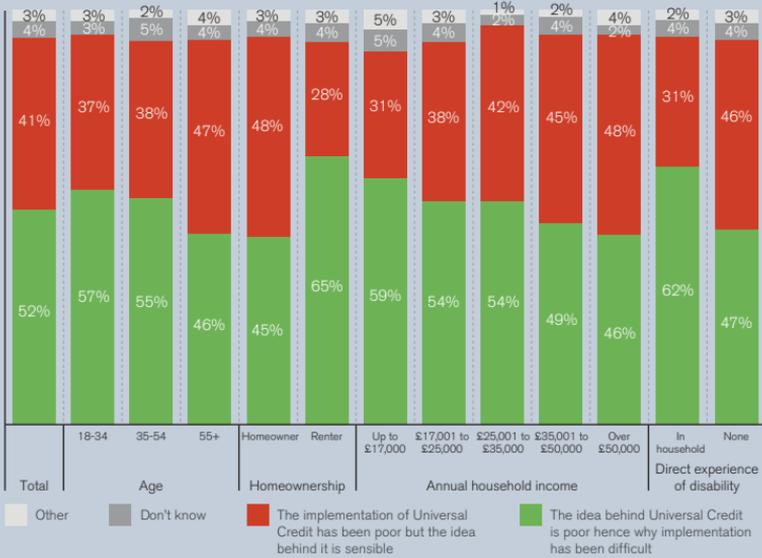


Conservative voters are far less likely to describe the introduction of Universal Credit as unsuccessful (37%) in comparison to supporters of the Labour Party (63%) and the SNP (67%), but it is notable that this is the most popular view among Conservatives.

It is also unsurprising that Yes/Remain voters are the most likely to describe the introduction of Universal Credit as unsuccessful (68%), while No/Leave voters are the least likely (43%), considering the political alignments within each group.

As a follow up, we also asked those who described the introduction as unsuccessful whether the main issue is the implementation of Universal Credit, or the very idea itself. The results for this are shown in Chart 5.3 below.

Chart 5.3. Views of Scots on the reasons why introduction of Universal Credit was unsuccessful, amongst those who described it as such, by age, homeownership, annual household income and direct experience of disability



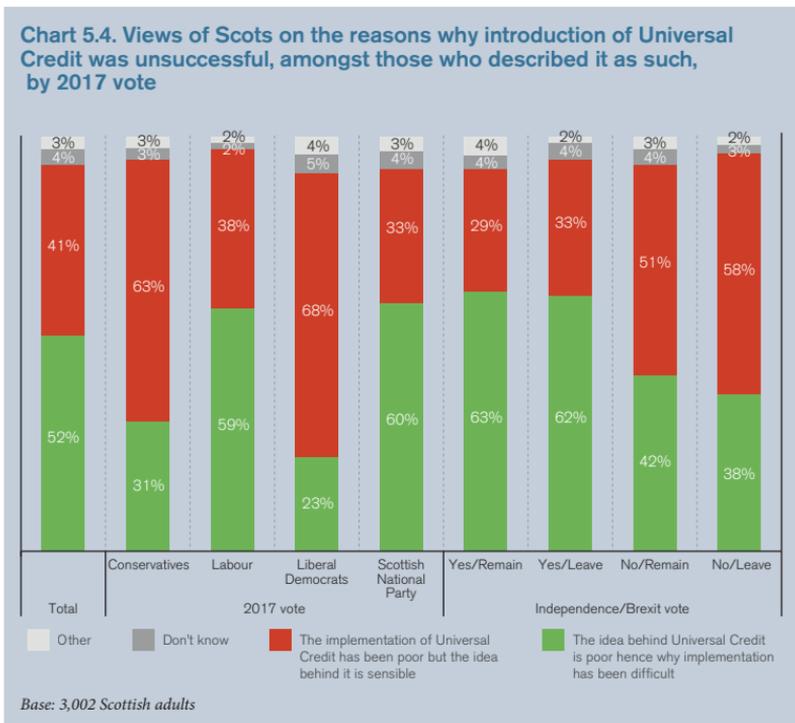
Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

Among those who think the introduction of Universal Credit has been unsuccessful, opinions are fairly split on why they think this: a slight majority (52%) believe that the idea itself is poor, leading to poor implementation, while a large minority (41%) described the idea as sensible, but implementation as poor.

There is some difference amongst age groups, with 57% of those between 18-34 believing that the idea itself is poor, but only 46% of those sceptical of Universal Credit aged 55 and over sharing the same view. Those on low incomes who are sceptical of Universal Credit are also more likely to see the idea itself as poor, with 59% of those who have below £17,000 household income having this view, in contrast to 46% of those who have household income of over £50,000. There is also a notable contrast in relation to direct experience of disability, with a firm majority (62%) of those with direct experience of it seeing the idea itself as poor,

while a slight minority (47%) of those who have not had direct experience thinking the same. Similarly, as usual, there is a notable difference in terms of homeownership, with a large majority (65%) of renters believing that the idea itself is poor, compared to a minority (45%) of homeowners.

As expected, there is also a political divide among Universal Credit sceptics, as Chart 5.4 below illustrates. Only 31% of Conservative and 23% of Liberal Democrat voters thought that the idea of Universal Credit itself was poor, but this increased to a majority of Labour (59%) and SNP voters (60%) for those who are sceptical of the idea of Universal Credit.



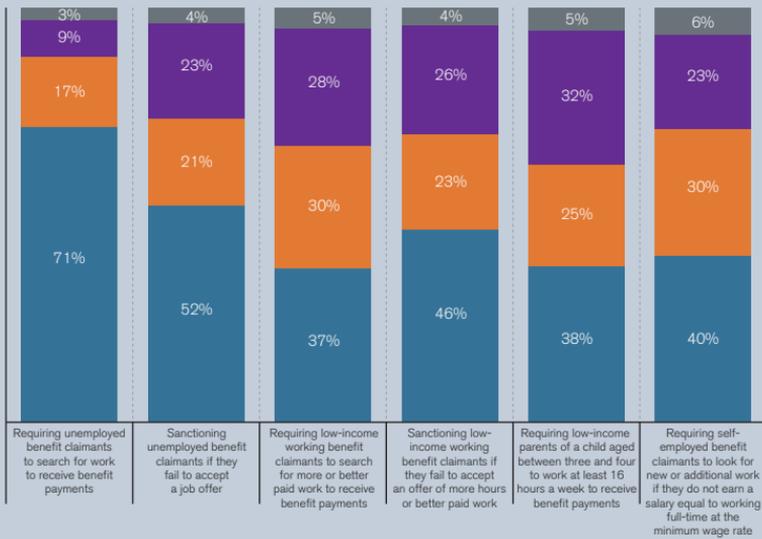
Yes voters who are sceptical of Universal Credit are also more likely to believe the idea of Universal Credit itself is to blame (61%), in contrast to a minority of No voters (41%) who are sceptical of Universal Credit.

Conditionality and sanctioning

The introduction of Universal Credit is accompanied by the tightening of the conditions that claimants must meet to continue to receive their benefit and avoid facing sanctions, which is where benefit payments are withdrawn for a set period of time. While unemployed claimants and parents of older children have for a long time been expected to fulfil certain conditionality criteria on a regular basis to receive benefit payments, Universal Credit extends this principle to a bigger group of parents, and to all self-employed and part-time working claimants who do not earn the equivalent of working full-time on a minimum wage basis.

We tested the attitudes of the Scottish public towards the application of conditionality and sanctioning to different claimant groups, with Chart 5.5 below summarising the findings. Overall, there is majority support for conditionality and sanctioning for unemployed claimants, while opinion is notably more divided on both conditionality and sanctioning for other groups of claimants.

Chart 5.5. Proportion of Scots who support specific conditionality and sanctioning regimes

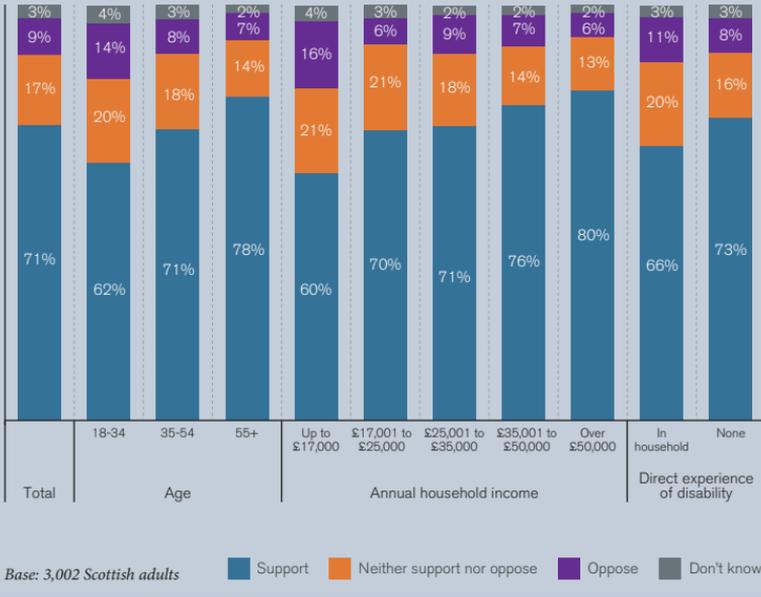


Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

Support Neither support nor oppose Oppose Don't know

Below, Chart 5.6 shows attitudes among different socio-demographic groups towards the condition of searching for work to receive Universal Credit if a claimant is unemployed. Later, Chart 5.7 shows public attitudes by different socio-demographic groups on sanctioning an unemployed claimant if they refuse a job offer.

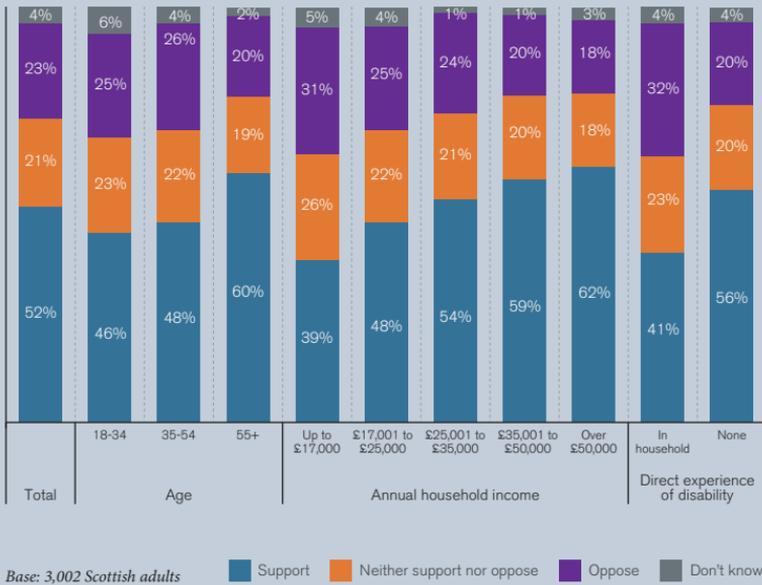
Chart 5.6. Proportion of Scots who support requiring unemployed benefit claimants to search for work to receive benefit payments, by age, annual household income, and direct experience of disability



When looking purely at unemployed benefit claimants, as noted there is majority support for both requiring them to search for work to receive benefit payments (71%) and for sanctioning unemployed claimants who fail to accept a job offer (52%), as can be seen in Charts 5.6 above and 5.7 below.

An age divide is present, with a clear majority (62%) of 18-34 year olds supporting conditionality and 46% supporting sanctioning for unemployed claimants, compared to a firmer majority (78% and 60% respectively) amongst those who are over 55.

Chart 5.7. Proportion of Scots who support sanctioning unemployed benefit claimants if they fail to accept a job offer by age, annual household income, and direct experience of disability

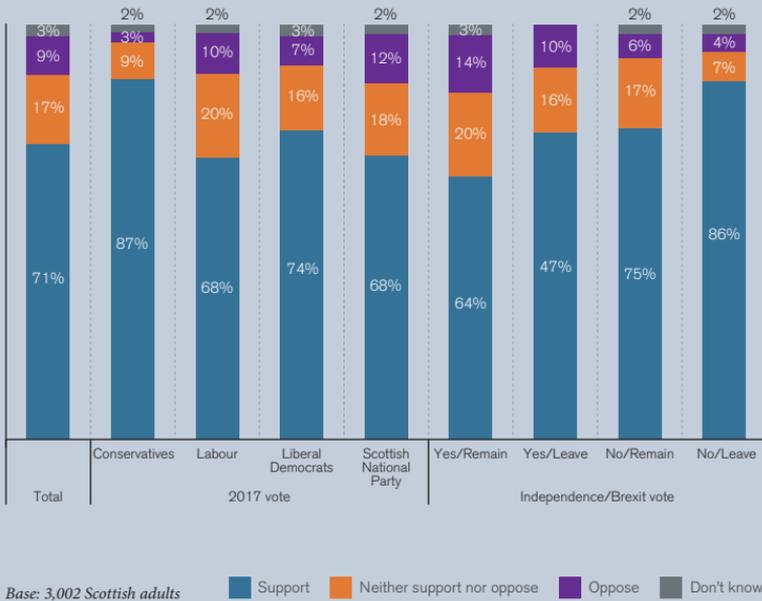


There are also notable divides in Scots' opinions in terms of household income, as Chart 5.7 above illustrates: while a majority (60%) of those in low-income households support conditionality for unemployed claimants, only a minority (39%) support sanctioning. Support for conditionality rises to 80% and for sanctioning to 62% for those in households earning over £50,000.

Finally, while direct experience of disability does lead to some difference in support for conditionality for unemployed claimants (66% for those with experience versus 73% for those with no experience), but the difference is larger in relation to sanctioning (41% for the former group versus 56% for the latter group).

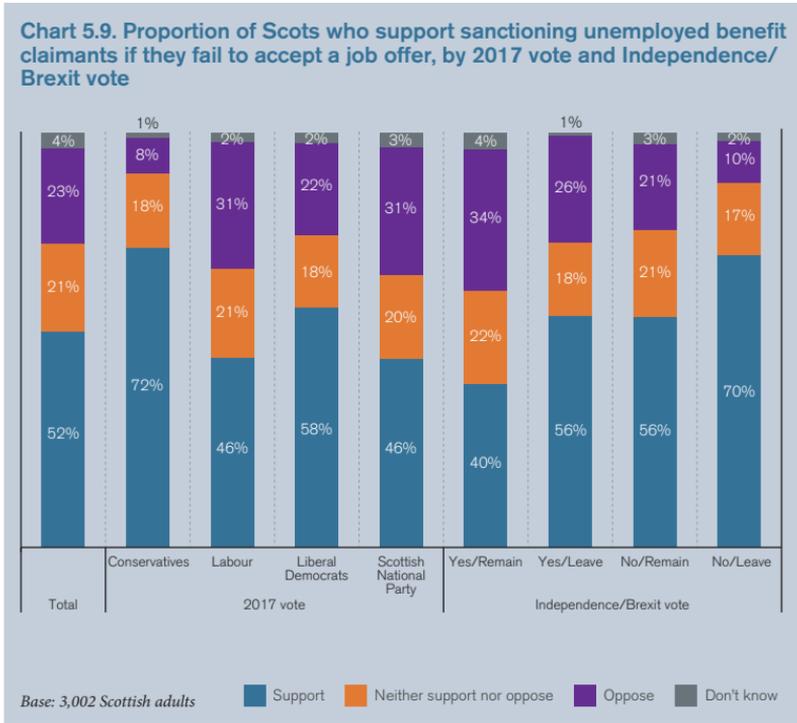
As Chart 5.8 below shows, there is majority support amongst all voting groups for the presence of conditionality for unemployed benefit claimants.

Chart 5.8. Proportion of Scots who support requiring unemployed benefit claimants to search for work to receive benefit payments, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



While Conservatives and No/Leave voters have overwhelming levels of support (87% and 86% respectively), Labour and SNP voters also support conditionality for unemployed claimants by more than two thirds (68%), indicating a presence of a consensus.

However, sanctioning unemployed claimants is much more divisive in terms of voting patterns, as Chart 5.9 below shows.



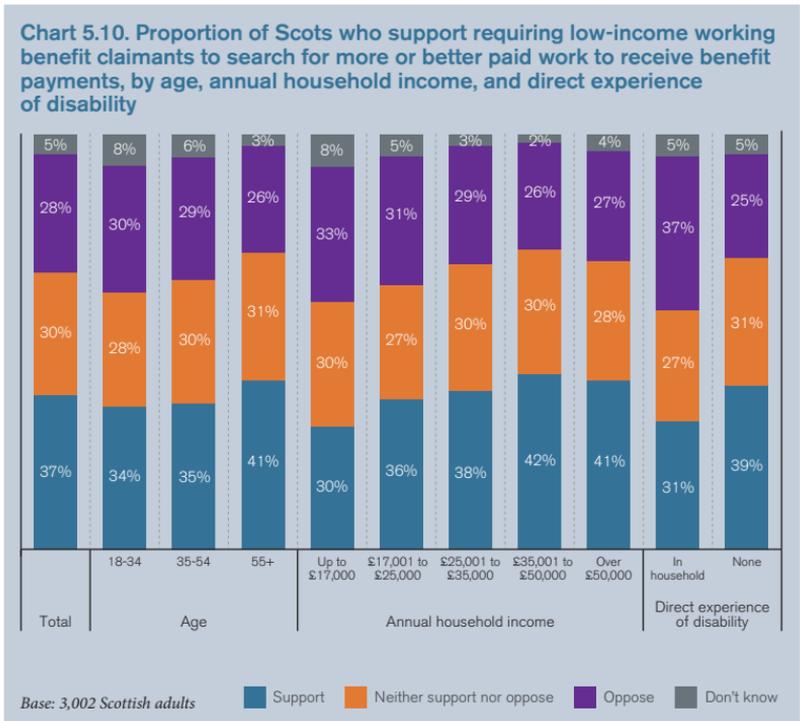
While sanctioning of unemployed benefit claimants is supported by a clear majority (72%) of Conservative voters, this number falls to a minority (46%) of both Labour and SNP voters. Meanwhile, only 40% of Yes/Remain voters support sanctioning of unemployed benefit claimants, but this rises to a clear majority (70%) amongst No/Leave voters. Despite this, it should be noted that support for sanctioning of unemployed benefit claimants is greater than opposition amongst all voting groups.

Universal Credit in-work conditionality

While conditions for unemployed claimants have existed for a long time, the introduction of in-work conditionality is a significant departure from the legacy system. Now those working part-time are expected to take action to improve their earnings if they fail to

meet an earnings threshold that is calculated at working full-time at the national minimum wage for most claimants, The precise extent of conditionality, and sanctioning, is not currently fixed as DWP is currently trialling approaches before making policy decisions.²⁹

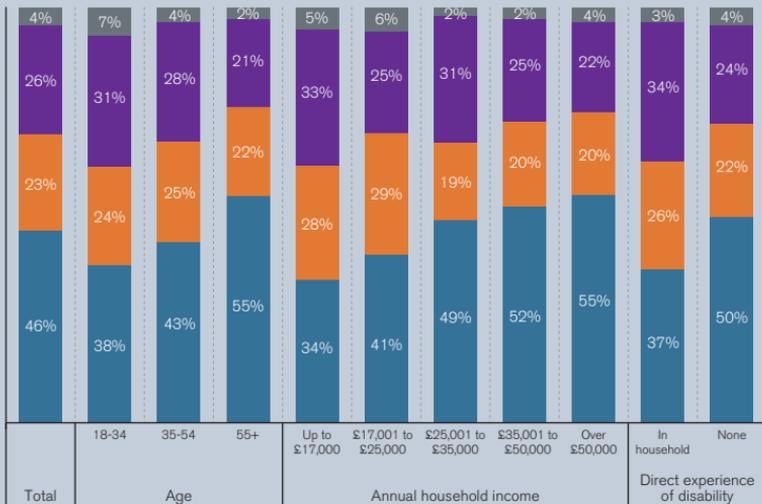
Requiring low-income, part-time working benefit claimants to search for more or better paid work to receive benefit payments, and sanctioning them if they fail to take up an offer of such work, is more controversial than other elements of the conditionality and sanctioning regime, as Chart 5.5 much earlier and Charts 5.10 and 5.11 below demonstrate. Only a minority of (37% and 46%) Scots support conditionality and sanctioning for these claimants in work respectively (Chart 5.10 and 5.11).



29. Department for Work and Pensions, “Universal Credit: in-work progression randomised control trial”, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/developing-in-work-support-for-people-claiming-universal-credit/universal-credit-in-work-progression-randomised-control-trial> (2018).

Notably, 30% of Scots neither support nor oppose in-work conditionality, while 23% say the same for sanctioning of low-income working benefit claimants. Once again, there is an age divide in regard to sanctioning, with a minority (38%) of 18-34 year olds supporting sanctioning of working claimants, as opposed to a majority (55%) of people aged 55 and over.

Chart 5.11. Proportion of Scots who support sanctioning low-income working benefit claimants if they fail to accept an offer of more hours or better paid work, by age, annual household income, and direct experience of disability



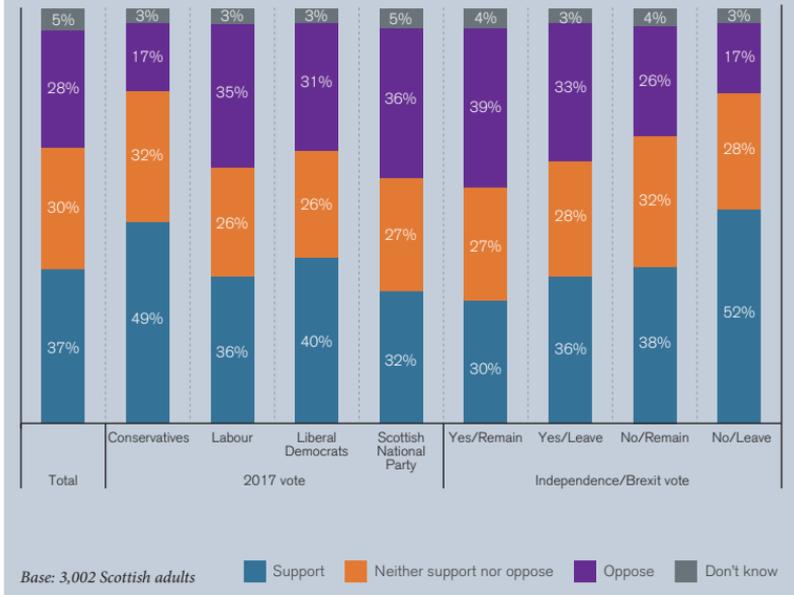
Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

Support Neither support nor oppose Oppose Don't know

Unsurprisingly, as Chart 5.11 above illustrates, a notable income divide also emerges, with only 30% of low-income voters supporting conditionality for in-work claimants and 34% supporting sanctioning them, while 41% of those in households earning over £50,000 support in-work claimants and a majority (55%) support the sanctioning of in-work claimants. Direct experience of disability is also linked to a notable divide on sanctioning, with 37% of those with direct experience

of disability supporting it for in-work claimants, while amongst those without such experience this rises to 50%.

Chart 5.12. Proportion of Scots who support requiring low-income working benefit claimants to search for more or better paid work to receive benefit payments, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote

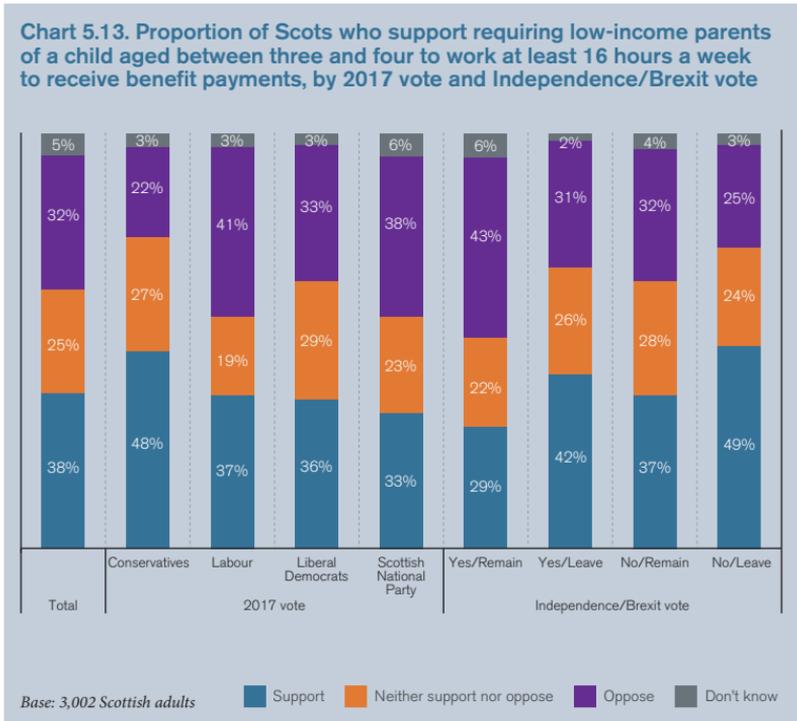


There is also variation by voting group in attitudes to in-work conditionality and sanctioning. While Conservatives (49%) and No/Leave voters (52%) are most supportive of conditionality for low-income working claimants, SNP (32%), and Yes/Remain voters (30%) are least supportive of it.

These trends are mirrored in attitudes to the sanctioning of in-work claimants, with Conservative voters (65%) and No/Leave voters (64%) most supportive and SNP voters (38%) and Yes/Remain voters (35%) least supportive.

Next, we examine conditionality introduced under Universal Credit which now requires low-income parents of a child aged between three and four to work at least 16 hours a week to receive benefit payments.

As shown earlier in Chart 5.5 and in Chart 5.13 below, a plurality (38%) of Scots support this measure, but 32% do oppose it.

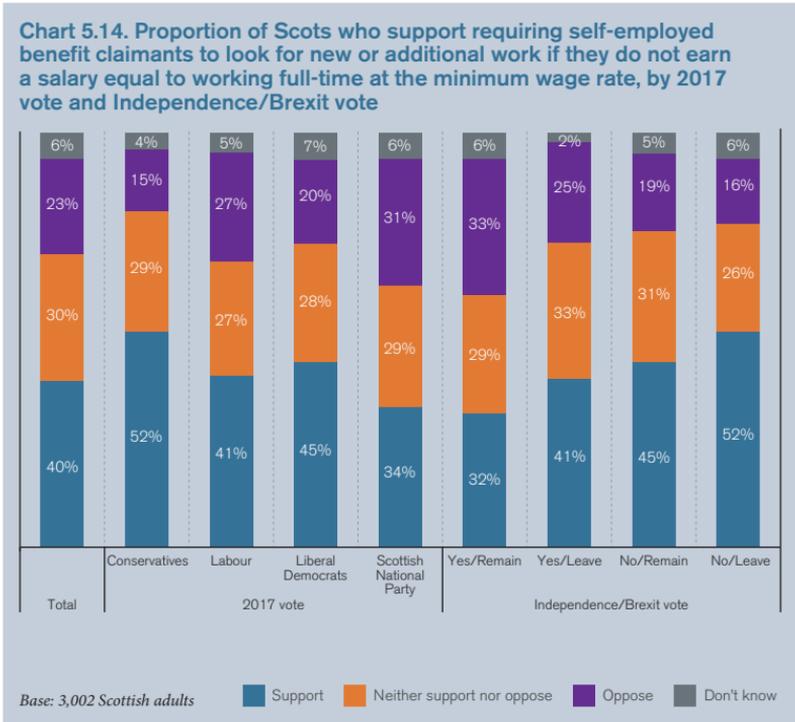


It is notable that there is no real differentiation in attitudes on conditionality for parents of three and four year olds along any socio-demographic group, including between people who are parents and who are not.

While Conservatives (48%) and No/Leave voters (49%) are most supportive of conditionality for claimants who are parents three and four year olds, SNP (33%) and Yes/Remain voters (29%) are least supportive of it, with opposition outweighing support for the latter group by a small margin.

Finally, we also polled requiring self-employed claimants to look for more work if they do not earn a wage equal to working full-time on national minimum wage, another new element of Universal Credit. As Chart 5.5 earlier and Chart 5.14 below illustrates, Scots are most likely

(40%) to support rather than oppose a measure.



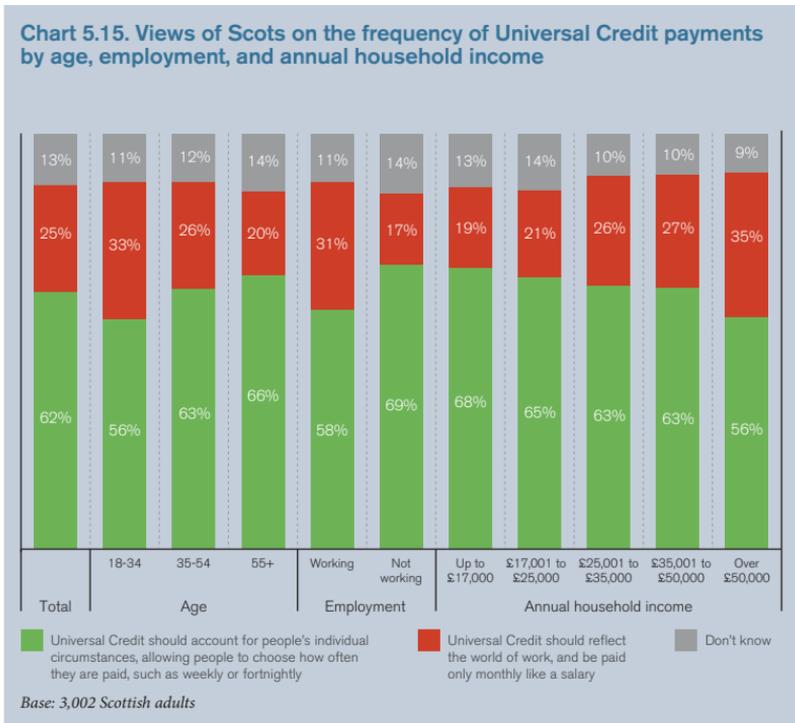
Support for conditionality for self-employed claimants has greater divides by age (34% amongst 18-34 year olds in contrast to 45% for those over 55), by income (30% for low-income households versus 47% for those earning over £50,000), and by homeownership (32% for renters versus 44% for homeowners).

As Chart 5.14 above illustrates, with conditionality for self-employed claimants, Conservative voters (52%) and No/Leave voters (52%) are most supportive of these requirements, and SNP voters (34%) and Yes/Remain voters (32%) are the least supportive. However, Labour and SNP voters are more likely to support (41% and 34%) than oppose (27% and 31%) conditionality for the self-employed, indicating a degree of cross-party support.

Scottish payment flexibilities in Universal Credit

As discussed in Chapter One, the Scottish Government introduced the Universal Credit Scottish Choices programme, which gives all Scottish claimants choices over whether they are paid monthly or bi-monthly, and on whether the housing element of their payment is paid directly to their landlord.

Chart 5.15 below shows attitudes towards letting Scottish claimants choose how often they are paid, indicating strong and broad agreement with this element of Scottish Choices.



In terms of frequency of payments, as Chart 5.15 above shows, a solid majority of Scots (62%) believe that Universal Credit claimants should be able to choose how often they are paid. There is a majority support for this across almost all socio-demographic groups, though some minor differences

should be noted. First, there are differences in terms of age, with those aged 18-34 being less supportive (56%) compared to those aged over 55 (66%). Second, those who are in work are also relatively less likely (58%) to support the choice in frequency of payments compared to those who are not working (69%). Third, those in households with lowest incomes are more supportive (68%) than those in households with highest incomes (56%), with the former also being more likely to be claiming Universal Credit.

There is also a small variance by voting, with Conservative voters (54%) being relatively less likely to support choice in frequency of payments compared to Labour (68%) and SNP (69%) voters. Similarly, there is a split in terms of EU and Independence referendum views, with Yes/Remain voters being relatively more supportive (69%) of the choice compared to No/Leave voters (55%). However, even voting groups with relatively lower levels of agreement have majority-level support for this particular element of Scottish Choices.

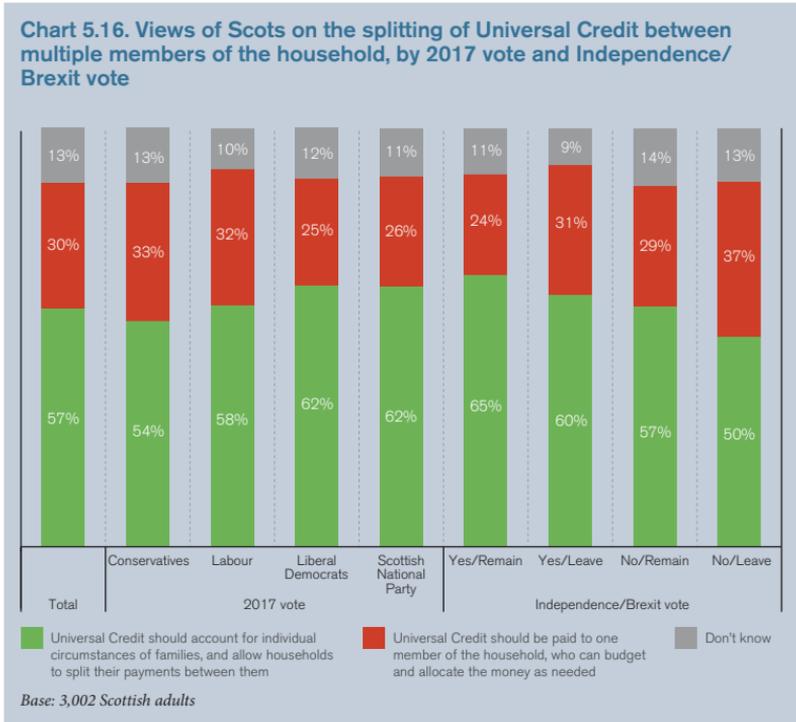
There is an even greater level of agreement with the other key element of Scottish Choices: being able to pay the housing element of Universal Credit directly to your landlord, with an overwhelming majority (74%) of Scots agreeing that such an option should be offered. Only 16% disagree. Notably, there is very little variation in support across socio-demographic groups and voting history. Labour voters (71%) and Yes/Remain voters (72%) are actually marginally less likely to support this policy, but the difference is still small.

Above and beyond these modifications introduced through Scottish Choices, there are other prominent ideas to improve Universal Credit. This includes enabling split payments between members of the same households, rather than the default of it going to one member of the household as originally designed. This is currently only available in very exceptional circumstances, particularly where there is suspicion of domestic violence or abuse. The Scottish Government has already committed to offering split payments in future,³⁰ but has not implemented

30. "Universal Credit and domestic abuse — Considering the options for split payments", <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmworpen/1166/116607.htm> (2018).

this yet.

Chart 5.16 below shows levels of support for this being a mainstream offer for Universal Credit claimants. There was a major level of agreement with split payments, with 57% supporting the idea that Universal Credit should account for individual circumstances of families and allow households to split them.

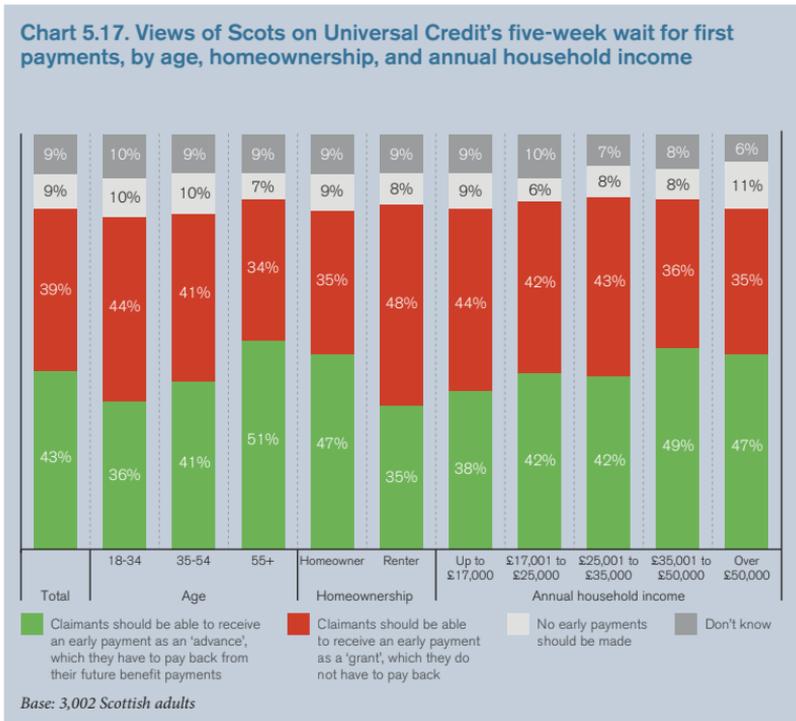


Similarly to views on direct payments to landlords, there was majority support for there to be split payments across socio-demographic groups with little notable variation. However, some minor differences could be observed in reference to voting, with 65% of Yes/Remain voters agreeing with people having access to split payments, while only 50% of No/Leave voters shared that view.

Other potential reforms to Universal Credit

Currently, Universal Credit claimants have to wait five weeks before receiving their first payment. All claimants have an option to receive an 'advance payment', up to the value of their monthly award. This effectively acts as a loan without interest. Bright Blue research has shown that most claimants are aware of this option and choose to take the 'advance'.³¹ However, as claimants must repay the 'advance payment', this negatively affects their cash flow in the months that follow.

Chart 5.17 below shows attitudes towards whether these advance payments should be loans, as is the case now, or grants, which is commonly proposed.



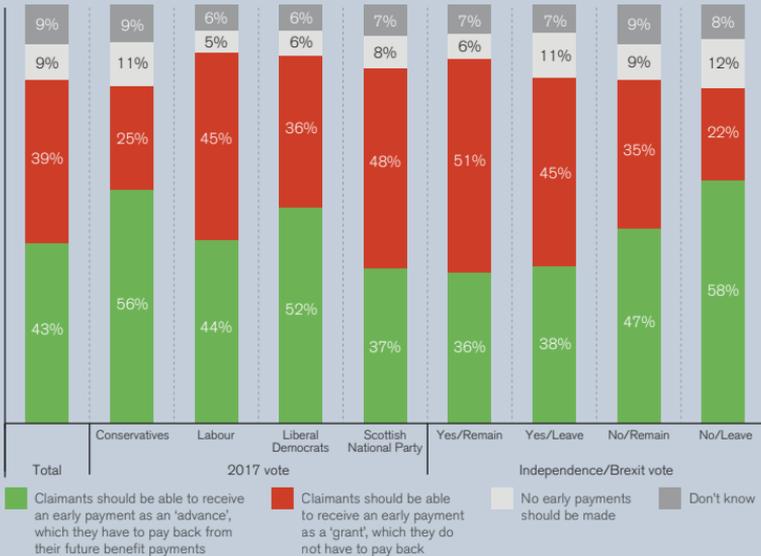
31. Ryan Shorthouse, Anvar Sarygulov and Sam Lampier, "Helping Hand? Improving Universal Credit", *Bright Blue*, <http://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Helping-hand.pdf> (2019), 8.

In comparison to other reforms to Universal Credit, there was notable division between Scots about how ‘advances’ should be granted to claimants, with the two options receiving similar levels of support. As can be seen in Chart 5.17 above, only 9% of Scots thought that no early payments should be made to alleviate the five-week wait. Meanwhile the most favoured option is the current loan system of ‘advances’, which a minority (43%) of Scots support, whereas slightly fewer (39%) believe that claimants should receive a grant which they do not have to pay back.

There is notable demographic variation on the structure of advance payments, with 44% of 18-34 year olds supporting grants and 36% supporting loans, while for those over 55, levels of support are flipped: 34% and 51% respectively. Similarly, while those with direct experience of disability are most likely to support grants (48%), while others are most likely to support loans (45%). Similarly, while 48% of those who are renting are supportive of grants, homeowners are most likely to prefer loans (47%).

The differences are starker when looking at voting history, as Chart 5.18 below demonstrates.

Chart 5.18. Views of Scots on Universal Credit's five-week wait for first payments, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

Only 25% of Conservative voters support giving grants to address the five-week wait, with the number increasing to 45% for Labour voters and 48% for SNP voters, which makes grants the most favoured option for advance payments for these two voting groups. There is also very prominent variation across the two referendum divides, with a majority (51%) of Yes/Remain voters and 45% of Yes/Leave voters supporting grants for advance payments, making this the preferred option for these voting groups, but only 35% of No/Remain voters and 22% of No/Leave voters sharing the same view, instead preferring a loans system.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the majority of Scots perceive the implementation of Universal Credit as unsuccessful, though Scots seem to be divided on whether the main issue is the implementation,

or the idea of Universal Credit itself. There is overall strong support for the presence of conditionality and sanctioning in the Universal Credit system, particularly for unemployed claimants.

There is strong support for the introduction of Scottish Choices in Universal Credit, which allows more frequent payments and the housing element to be paid directly to the landlord. There is also majority support to allow split payments, which the Scottish Government have said they would introduce but have not yet. Views around introducing grants for advance payments are more split, with slightly more people preferring to retain the current system of loans.

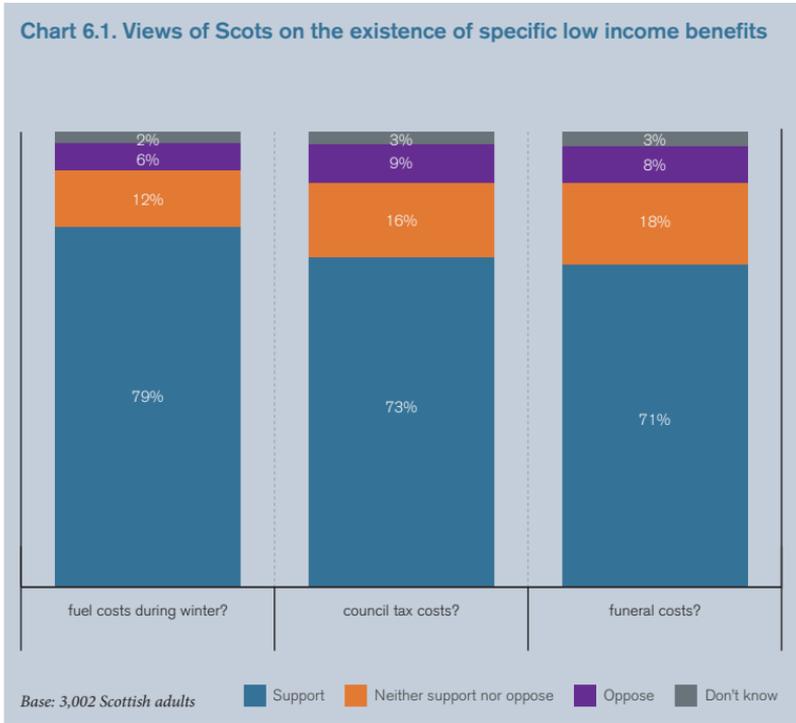
Overall, household income, age and direct experience of disability are frequently associated with differences in attitudes towards aspects of Universal Credit, reflecting the differences in attitudes towards social security seen elsewhere in this report. Those who are in lower income households, those who are younger and those with direct experience of disability are more likely to see Universal Credit as unsuccessful, more likely to oppose conditionality and sanctioning for different claimant groups, and are slightly more likely to support policies that increase flexibility in how claimants receive Universal Credit. The same can be said about Labour and SNP voters, who tend to be much more critical of Universal Credit and its default features, and more open to introducing changes compared to Conservative voters.

Chapter 6: **Attitudes to continuing and new devolved benefits**

Having examined in detail the attitudes of Scots towards the implementation and reform of Universal Credit in the previous chapter, we now turn to Scottish public attitudes on new devolved benefits being introduced by the Scottish Government. While the Scottish Government was devolved a number of benefits, as noted in Chapter One, we have chosen to focus on the three most major areas of reform: low income, disability and children benefits. This chapter begins by examining support for a range of low income benefits devolved to the Scottish Government. The chapter then goes on to examine attitudes towards new and reformed disability and child benefits that the Scottish Government has recently introduced or will be introducing soon.

Devolved low income benefits

As discussed in Chapter One, Scotland was devolved several benefits which are given to meet specific costs: Cold Weather Payment, which helps those with low incomes with fuel costs during cold weather, Winter Fuel Payment, which helps pensioners with fuel costs during winter, and Funeral Expense Payment, which helps those with low income with funeral costs. Furthermore, Scotland also maintained a centralised Council Tax Reduction scheme since 2013, which offers help with council tax costs for those on low incomes.



Overall, there is a very high level of support for a range of benefits that have been devolved to the Scottish Government to assist people on low incomes with specific costs, as Chart 6.1 above indicates. Seventy-nine percent of Scots support the existence of a devolved benefit to help with fuel costs during winter, making it the most popular devolved benefit for those on low incomes. Next, 71% support the existence of a devolved benefit for council tax costs and 73% support the existence of a devolved benefit for funeral costs.

In reference to a devolved benefit for fuel costs during winter, there is a slight age divide, with the overwhelming level of support (86%) amongst those over 55 falling to 69% amongst those who are between 18 and 34. Considering older people are currently the main beneficiaries of Winter Fuel Allowance, it is unsurprising to see higher levels of support amongst older age groups for this devolved

benefit. Otherwise, the level of overwhelming consensus on this devolved benefit among different socio-demographic and voting groups is notable.

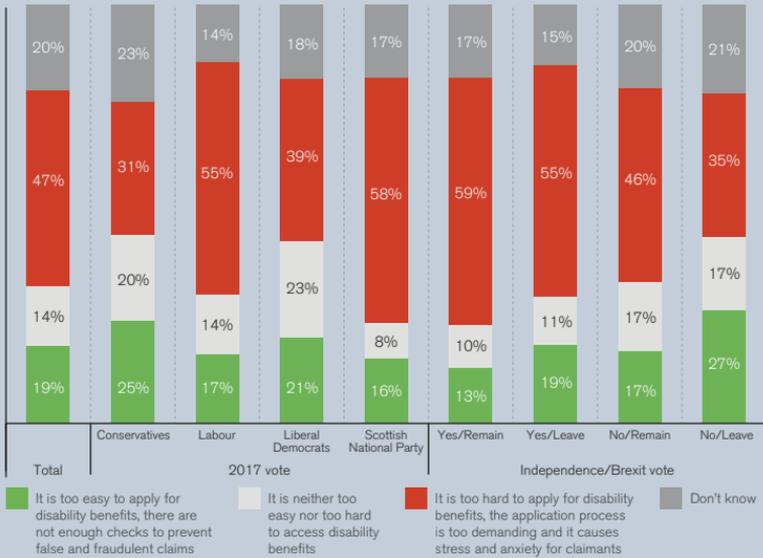
In regard to a devolved benefit for funeral costs, there are no notable socio-demographic divides, with high levels of support for such a benefit being consistent across all socio-demographic groups. However, despite majority support amongst all voting groups, there are some notable differences, with Conservatives (61%) and No/Leave voters (62%) being notably less supportive of this new, devolved benefit in comparison to Labour (76%) and SNP (78%) voters, and Yes/Remain voters (78%).

Assisting people on low incomes with a devolved benefit for council tax costs also has majority support across all socio-demographic groups, though those in households with income below £17,000 have a greater tendency to support (77%) such assistance than those in households with income above £50,000 (66%). Similarly, while there is majority support for this devolved benefit across the voting divides, Conservatives (61%) are less likely to be supportive in contrast to Labour (82%) voters, and No/Leave voters (64%) are also less likely to support it in comparison to both groups of Yes voters (80% each).

Devolved disability benefits

As Chapter One outlined, the Scottish Government is planning to introduce a number of changes to disability benefits. This includes changes to how assessments are conducted, by whom they are conducted, and how long the new devolved awards last. To examine attitudes to these changes to disability benefits, we start by examining views towards the ease of accessing disability benefits, which Chart 6.2 below shows.

Chart 6.2. Views of Scots on the accessibility of disability benefits by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

As Chart 6.2 above indicates, a plurality (47%) of Scots believe that it is too hard to apply for disability benefits. In contrast, 19% believe that it is too easy and that there are not enough checks, and only 14% believe that it is neither too easy nor too hard.

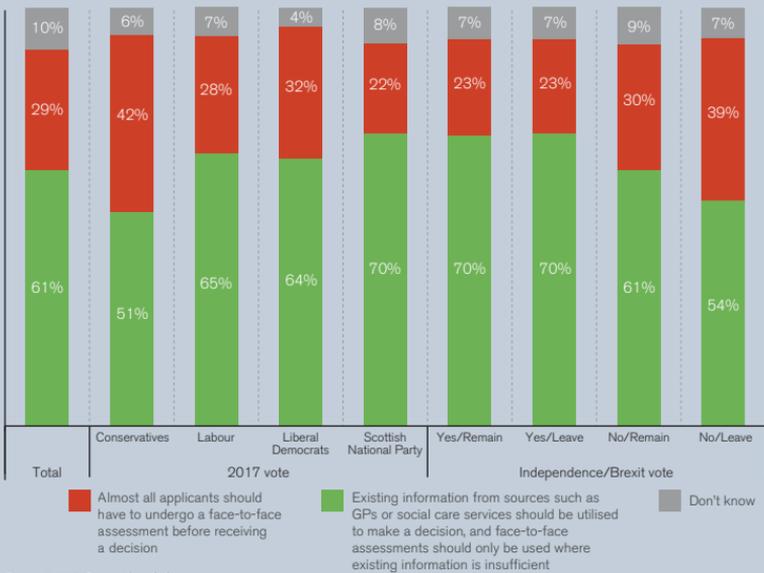
Unsurprisingly, the most striking variation in views is between households who have direct experience of disability, where 69% think the process is too hard, and households who do not, where only 39% think the process is too hard. There is also a notable difference in attitudes over whether the process is too hard in terms of income, with a majority (56%) of those having a household income of below £17,000 believing that it is too hard to apply for disability benefits, in contrast to a minority (40%) of those having a household income of above £50,000.

There is also a notable difference according to voting history, as Chart 6.2 above shows.

Yes/Remain voters are the group most likely to believe the process for applying for disability benefits is too hard (59%), while No/Leave voters are much less likely to have this view (35%). Unsurprisingly, this difference is also reflected in the 2017 election vote, with a clear majority (58%) of SNP voters seeing the process as too hard, as opposed to a clear minority (31%) of Conservative voters. Conservative voters are fairly evenly split between the four options presented, suggesting a broad division in perceptions of the ease of accessing disability benefits.

The Scottish Government have made a significant change to disability benefits: eventually, face-to-face assessments will only be required if there is no other practicable way to make a decision, as aforementioned in Chapter One. Chart 6.3 below illustrates Scottish public attitudes towards this change.

Chart 6.3. Views of Scots on the role of face-to-face assessments in applications for disability benefits, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

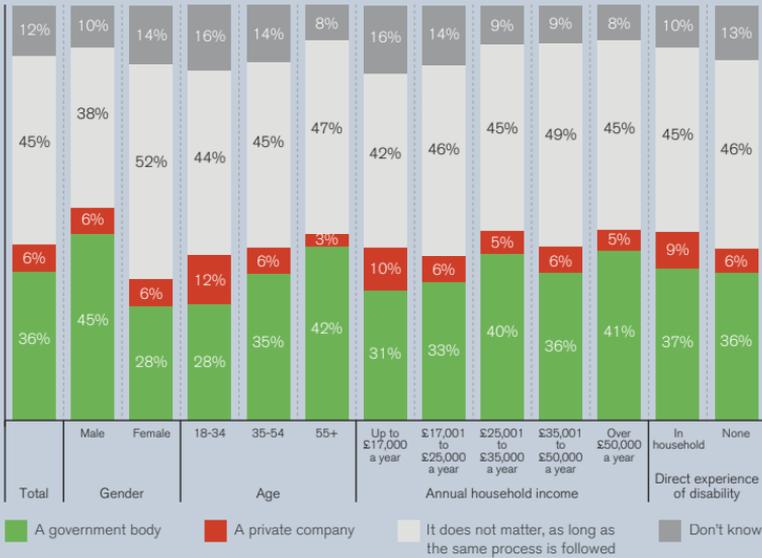
There is a high level of support for the new Scottish Government policy to move towards significantly fewer face-to-face assessments for those who are applying for disability benefits, with a majority (61%) of Scots believing that existing information from sources such as GPs and social services should primarily be used.

Direct experience of disability and income levels are associated with some variation in support for the new policy, with support falling from 64% for those in household with below £17,000 in income to 53% for those in households with over £50,000 per year, while those with direct experience of disability support the new policy at 74%, in contrast with 56% for other households.

As Chart 6.3 illustrates, there is also some divergence by voting history, with support for moving away from face-to-face assessments ranging from 70% for SNP voters and both Yes/Remain voters and Leavers, to 54% amongst No/Leave voters and 51% amongst Conservative voters. Nonetheless, there is still majority support for the reforms to the assessment for disability benefits among all voting groups.

Another significant change the Scottish Government is introducing is delivering face-to-face assessments through a government body, Social Security Scotland, rather than utilising a contracted private company. Below, Chart 6.4 illustrates that Scottish public attitudes are split on this change.

Chart 6.4. Views of Scots on which organisations are best suited to make decisions on whether someone is eligible for disability benefits, by gender, age, annual household income, and direct experience of disability



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

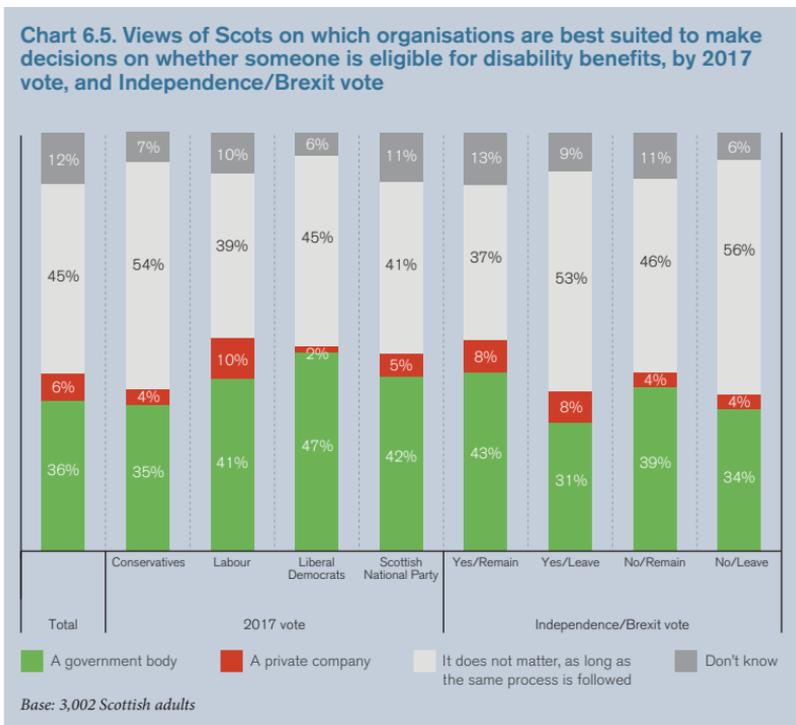
Many Scots (45%) do not believe that it matters whether a government body or a private company makes decisions on eligibility of disability benefits, as long as the same process is followed. However, a much higher number of Scots (36%) think that a government body is the most suitable organisation compared to the number of Scots (6%) who believe that a private company is most suitable.

Notably, unlike for other questions on disability benefits, there is no variation in relation to direct experience of disability. Nevertheless, interestingly, people in households with income below £17,000 are less likely (31%) to think that a government body is best suited to make such decisions on disability benefits in contrast to households with over £50,000 income (41%).

Variation by gender and age was also notable, with men and older people more likely to believe that a government body is best suited to conduct assessments about disability benefits. While 45% percent of men believe that

a government body is most suited to carry out eligibility assessments, only 28% of women expressed the same opinion. Similarly, only 28% of Scots between the age of 18-34 believe that a government body is most suited, as compared to 42% of those aged over 55. Intriguingly, while in total only 6% of respondents believed that private companies were best suited to carry out disability assessments, this increased to 12% amongst those aged 18-34.

There was also variation by voting history on attitudes towards the reform of a government body only assessing disabled claimants, as Chart 6.5 below exemplifies.



A majority of both groups of Leave voters (53% for Yes voters and 56% for No voters) and Conservative voters (54%) thought that it did not matter which type of organisation makes decisions on disability eligibility, as long as the same process is followed, though this view is also shared by a sizeable

minority of Labour (39%), SNP voters (41%) and Yes/Remain voters (37%).

Box 6.1. The 'Bedroom tax'

An aspect of the social security system that was devolved to the Scottish Government at an earlier stage, in 2013, is Discretionary Housing Payments. Through them, the Scottish Government mitigates the effect of the under-occupancy charge, also known as the 'Bedroom Tax', where social housing tenants who have an unoccupied bedroom receive less in housing benefit from the UK Government, with Scotland covering the difference.

As Chart 6.6 below shows, when asked about the under-occupancy charge, 52% of Scots oppose this UK policy, thereby suggesting agreement with the changes introduced by the Scottish Government.

Chart 6.6. Views of Scots on the 'under-occupancy charge', or 'bedroom tax', by age, homeownership, annual household income, direct experience of disability



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

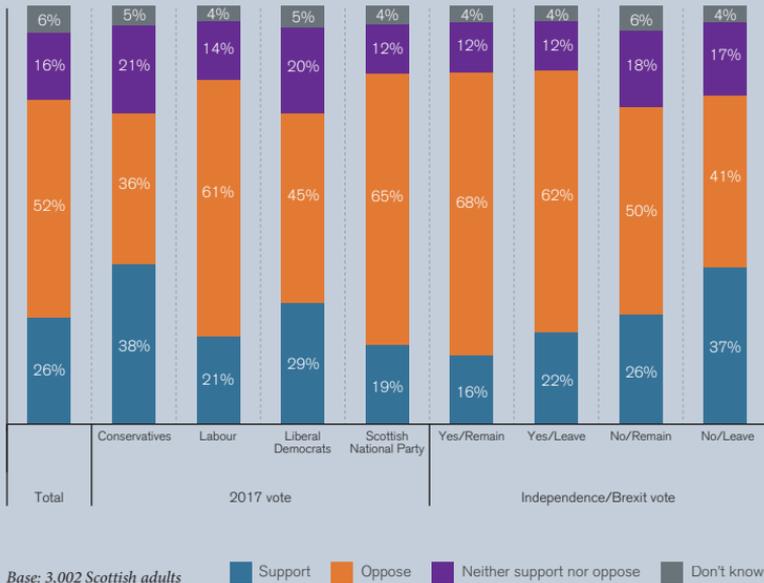
Support Oppose Neither support nor oppose Don't know

The degree of opposition varies by socio-demographic groups. Opposition to the under-occupancy charge is lower at younger ages (45% for those aged 18-34 compared with 57% for those over 55), amongst homeowners (47% for them versus 61% for those who rent, including 67% of social renters), and at higher levels of household income (43% for those in households earning over £50,000 as opposed to 55% for those below £17,000). There is also a notable split by direct experience of disability, with opposition falling from 62% of those in households who have direct experience of it to 48% of those who do not.

This variance by homeownership, disability, older age and household income is unsurprising, considering that these factors are also all associated with a higher likelihood of living in social housing and being potentially affected by the under-occupancy charge.

As usual, there is some variation by voting history, as Chart 6.7 below indicates.

Chart 6.7. Views of Scots on the 'under-occupancy charge', or 'bedroom tax', by 2017 past vote and Independence/Brexit vote

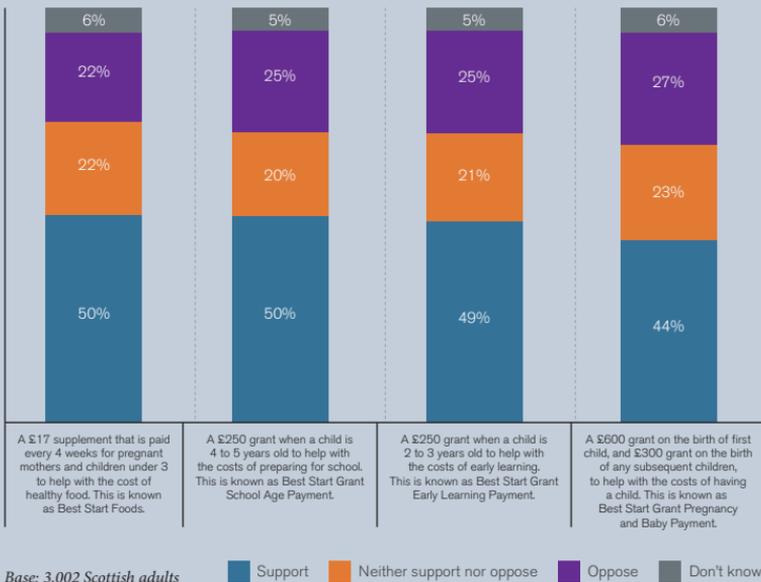


As shown above, a clear majority (68%) of Yes/Remain voters oppose the UK under-occupancy charge and both Labour (61%) and SNP voters (65%) oppose it by a notable majority, while Conservative voters are split, with 38% supporting it and 36% opposing it.

Devolved children's benefits

As outlined in Chapter One, the Scottish Government has also introduced significant changes to provision of social security for low-income families with children. This includes reform of the Sure Start Maternity Grant under the new name of Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment, and the introduction of several new grants for young children. Chart 6.8 below illustrates public support for the new grants introduced by the Scottish Government.

Chart 6.8. Views of Scots on specific policies offering additional support for families with children



There is a broad level of support for the expansion of the Sure Start Maternity Grant that the Scottish Government has introduced, though not all aspects of the new regime have majority support. Both Best Start Grant School Age Payment and Best Start Foods have support of 50% of respondents, followed by Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment at 49%, and Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment at 44%. While opposition to all of these policies is between 22% and 27%, a similar proportion (between 20% and 23%), neither support nor oppose all of these new devolved children's payments.

In terms of age, support for these new devolved payments for children fell from majority support amongst those aged 18 to 34, to minority support amongst those over the age of 55.

Unsurprisingly, there is also notable variation by parenting status. Those who currently have a child under the age of 18 are more likely to support these Best Start schemes, with majority support for all four benefits, in comparison to those with children over the age of 18 and those who have no children where there is only minority support (ranging from 40% to 46% support). However, levels of support for the new devolved payments for children are still greater than opposition for these different social groups.

There is also a notable division between homeowners and renters. Homeowners only give minority support for the four Best Start schemes, while a majority of renters express support for each of the grants. However, homeowners are still more likely to support the schemes than oppose them.

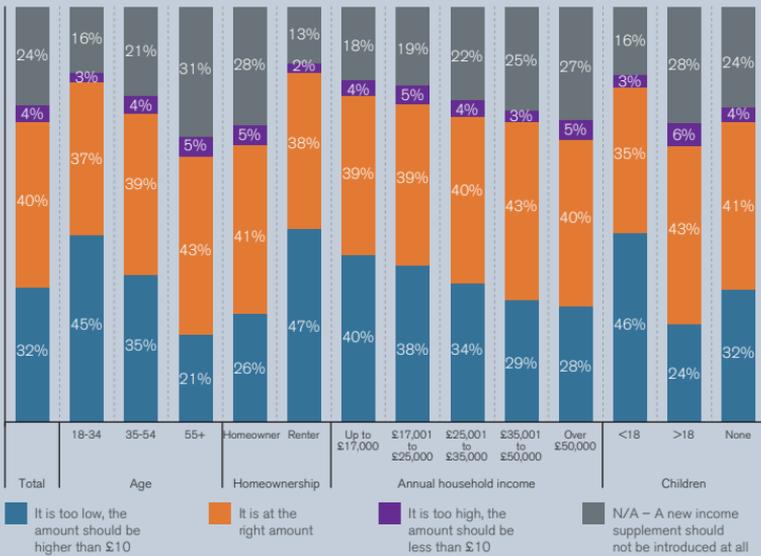
There is also some divergence in terms of education levels, with only 33% of those with no formal qualifications supporting the Best Start Pregnancy and Baby Payment, in contrast to 47% of those who have at least further or higher education. Similarly, while 40% of those who have no formal qualifications or only GCSE or equivalent support the Best Start Early Learning Payment, this figure rises to 51% amongst all other education groups. Finally, while 43% of those with no formal qualifications support the Best Start School Age Payment, this number rises to 54% amongst those with Scottish Highers or equivalent level of education. The differences in support for Best Start Foods, which is the most popular of the four new

children’s benefits, by different education levels is relatively small.

Variations by party and referendum allegiances are more prominent. Conservative voters and No/Leave voters tend to have low levels of support (between 27% and 36%) for all the Best Start Payments, with opposition being greater than support for all types of grants other than Best Start Foods in the case of Conservative voters. In contrast, a majority of Labour and SNP voters express support for all Best Start grants, as do Yes/Remain voters (ranging from 59% to 65% support).

Finally, as outlined in Chapter One, the Scottish Government has announced the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment, a new benefit given to families who are entitled to certain benefits, with the purpose of reducing child poverty. The level of support for this new devolved benefit is demonstrated in Chart 6.9 below.

Chart 6.9. Views of Scots on Scottish Child Payment amount, by age, homeownership, annual household income, and age of children



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

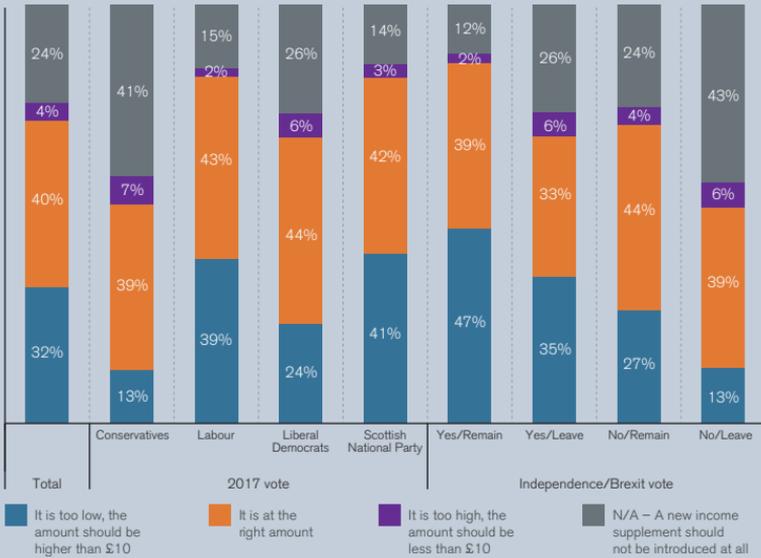
There is a high level of support for the new Scottish Child Payment, with 40% believing £10 per week is the right amount, while 32% believe that it should be higher. However, almost one in four (24%) think it should not be introduced while only 4% believe that the level should be lower than £10.

Those over the age of 55 are much less likely to think the amount is set too low (21%) in comparison to those aged 18 to 34 (45%), and are more likely to think it should not be introduced at all (31%).

Similarly, renters are most likely to see £10 per week as insufficient (47%), while homeowners are most likely to believe that it is set at the right amount.

Finally, and unsurprisingly, parents with children under 18 are the most likely to see a need for a higher amount (46%), while those with children aged over 18 (24%) and those without children (32%) are less likely to share this view.

Once again, more pronounced differences can be observed by voting history, as Chart 6.10 below shows.

Chart 6.10. Views of Scots on Scottish Child Payment amount, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote

Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

Conservative voters and No/Leave voters are most likely to believe that a new supplement should not have been introduced at all by the Scottish Government (41% and 43% respectively), closely followed by believing it is at the right level (39% for both groups). In contrast, SNP and Labour voters are most likely to believe that it has been set at the right level (42% and 43% respectively), followed by believing that it should be higher (41% and 39% respectively). Yes/Remain voters are most likely to think that it should be higher (47%), followed by seeing it as the right amount (39%).

Conclusion

Overall, there is majority support for the new, devolved low-income benefits being introduced in Scotland, with support across different socio-demographic and voting groups. Similarly, there was major

support for the changes to disability benefits that are being introduced by the Scottish Government, though the Scots are more likely to believe it does not matter that a government body has to be the organisation assessing eligibility for them as long as the same rules apply to all providers. Finally, there is majority support amongst Scots for the introduction of Best Start grants for children and the introduction of the Scottish Child Payment, though there is less of a consensus among different voting groups.

In terms of socio-demographic patterns, both age and income featured frequently, with notable differences on support for new devolved low-income, disability and child benefits. Other groups had notable differences where the benefit in question was more likely to affect them. As expected, those with direct experience of disability tended to be more concerned about the application process for benefits and more supportive of the changes introduced by the Scottish Government, but — in line with the general public — were agnostic about which type of organisation carried out assessments. Similarly, parents of children under 18 tended to be more supportive of the additional Best Start grants being introduced by the Scottish Government.

In terms of voting groups, there is significant consensus on support for new devolved low-income benefits, but views were consistently more mixed on new devolved disability and child benefits, with Conservative voters and No/Leave voters being much more sceptical about reforms to disability benefits and about introduction of Bes Start grants in comparison to Labour and SNP voters.

In the next chapter, we examine levels of support for a variety of potential policies for the social security system in Scotland.

Chapter 7: Improving Scottish social security

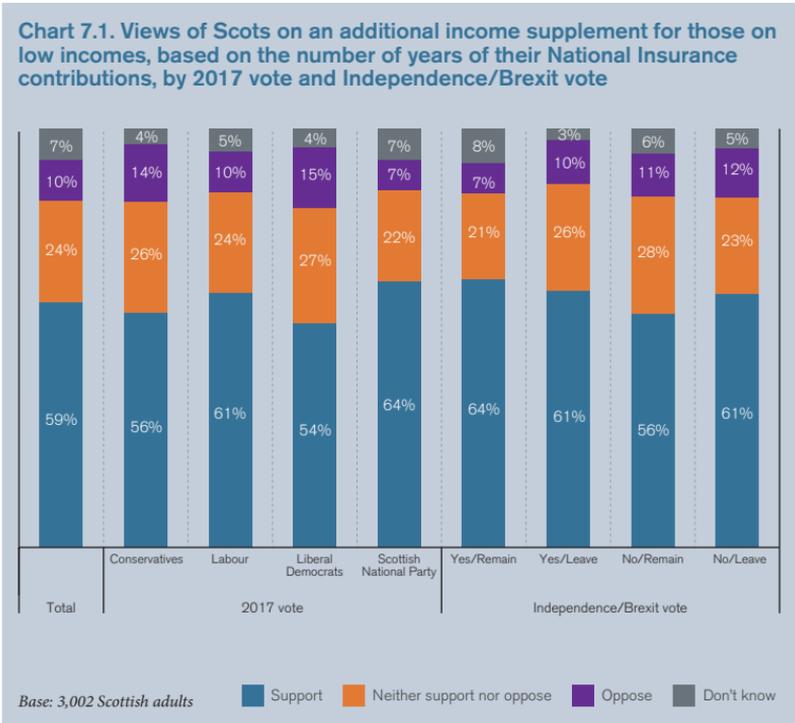
Having considered Scottish public attitudes towards new devolved benefits, this chapter explores Scottish public attitudes towards new and alternative reforms to the Scottish social security system. This includes Bright Blue policy ideas, prominent employment-related ideas, and prominent family-related ideas. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight whether there might be popular support in Scotland for additional and alternative reforms to what the Scottish Government is gradually implementing.

Testing Bright Blue policies

As shown in Chapter Four, a majority of Scots (64%) support the principle that social security should provide greater help for those who have previously paid taxes. Hence, Scots were asked if an additional income supplement for those on low incomes should be introduced, based on the number of years of their National Insurance contributions. This is shown in Chart 7.1 below.

This policy idea has been advocated by Bright Blue and is based on previous Bright Blue work highlighting that Conservative voters find reciprocity, where access to benefits is based on previous contributions, to be an important principle for social security.³²

32. Ryan Shorthouse and David Kirkby, "Give and Take: How conservatives think about welfare", *Bright Blue*, <https://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Giveandtake.pdf>, 10.



An income supplement based on the number of years of paying NI contributions attracted a majority approval of 59% amongst the Scottish public, with only 10% of Scots explicitly opposing. Support for this idea is fairly similar across different socio-demographic and voting groups, never dropping below majority support.

Notably, there is majority support for the introduction of this National Insurance contribution-based low-income supplement across all household income bands, including low-income respondents. Support is highest amongst those in households with income between £25,001 and £35,000, and £35,001 and £50,000 (64% and 65% respectively), but drops to 55% for those in households earning over £50,000.

The proposal commands approval across all age groups with some variation. Unsurprisingly, the age group most likely to support this

idea are those who would have the greatest chance of immediately benefitting from its implementation: 62% of those aged above 55 support it, whereas only 55% of those aged 18-34 do.

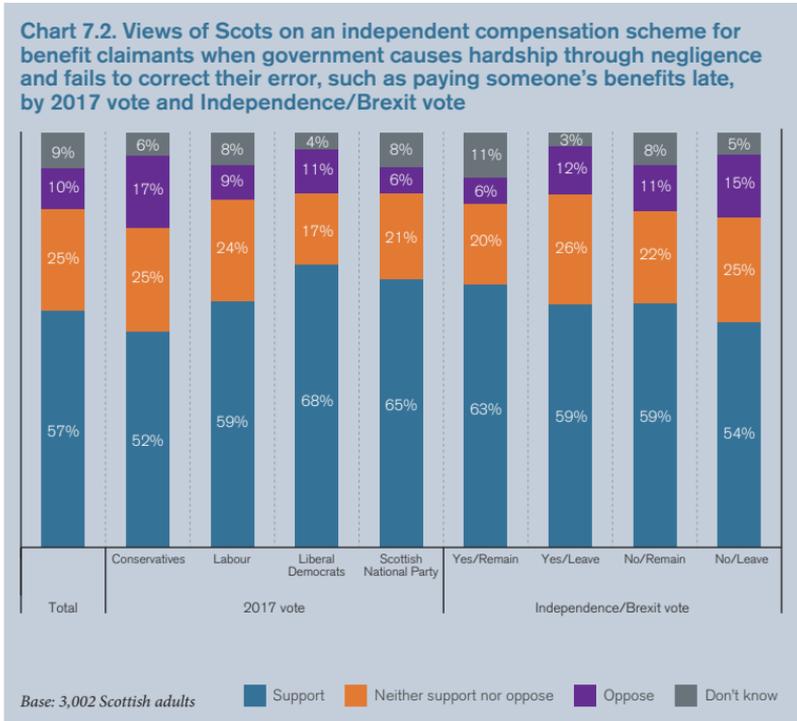
In terms of political views, there is a notable consensus around the idea of supplementing income based on the number of years paying National Insurance contributions.

Support for this type of supplement attracts majority support across all voting groups, ranging from 54% for Liberal Democrats to a high of 64% for Yes/Remain voters and SNP voters.

Next, we tested Bright Blue's idea of an independent compensation scheme for benefit claimants when government causes errors and hardship, such as paying benefits late. This policy idea emerged from Bright Blue research into Universal Credit, where the fieldwork revealed that many claimants felt the DWP does not take adequate responsibility for their errors.³³ Considering that claimants have specific obligations and are sanctioned if they do not comply, some felt that there should be a greater degree of reciprocity, with DWP needing to take more responsibility for their errors.

We tested Scots' attitudes to this policy idea of an independent compensation scheme, as chart 7.2 below illustrates.

33. Ryan Shorthouse, Anvar Sarygulov and Sam Lampier, "Helping Hand? Improving Universal Credit", *Bright Blue*, <http://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Helping-hand.pdf> (2019).



Such a compensation scheme attracts majority support of 57% amongst Scots. Majority support is present amongst almost every socio-demographic and voting group, with the surprising exception of those aged 18 to 34.

There is a positive relationship between age and support for the introduction of an independent compensation scheme. Sixty-five percent of those aged above 65 support this idea. In contrast, only 47% of those aged 18-34 approve of the idea, although it is still the most preferred option.

Interestingly, those with direct experience of disability (64%) and those not in work (64%) are much more likely than those without experience of disability (54%) and those in work (52%) to support the policy idea, no doubt because these groups are more likely to have had experience of the benefits system.

Notably, an independent compensation scheme holds majority approval across all groups of voters. Though support is lowest amongst Conservatives (52%), a majority of these voters still agree with the introduction of such a compensation scheme.

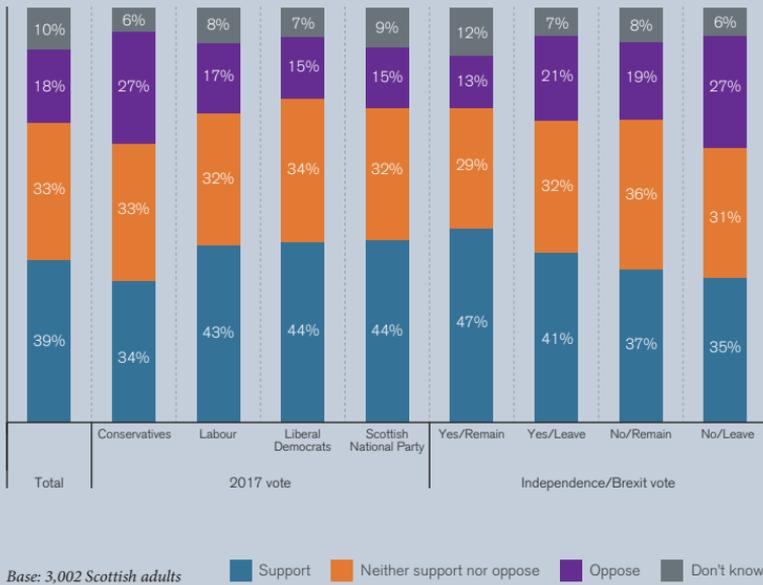
Next, Scots were polled on two Bright Blue policies from our recent report, *Helping hand?*, that would seek to reward unemployed people working very hard to find employment, as judged by Jobcentre staff.³⁴ The first proposal rewards unemployed people who worked hard to find a job with an additional income supplement. The second rewards a small number of unemployed claimants judged by Jobcentre staff to be meeting the most demanding conditions around job seeking by entry into a prize competition. Scottish public attitudes towards these two policy ideas are revealed in Charts 7.3 and 7.4 below.

Though similar in their goal of rewarding the jobseekers who are working hard to find unemployment, the prize competition policy is considerably less popular than the additional income supplement policy. The additional income supplement attracts plurality support of 39% with 18% opposing, and 33% picking neither option. In contrast, the prize competition policy attracts plurality opposition of 41%, and support of only 18%, but with 30% picking neither.

No notable socio-demographic variations have been observed in terms of support or opposition to policies on rewarding some unemployed people with an income supplement or offering them a prize competition.

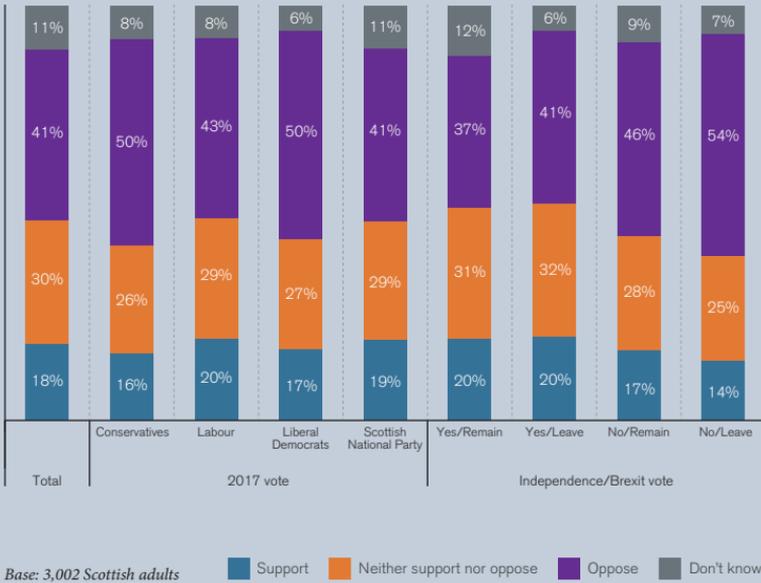
34. Ibid.

Chart 7.3. Views of Scots on an additional income supplement for unemployed and job seeking benefit claimants who are judged by Jobcentre staff to have been in long-term unemployment despite having worked hard to find a new job, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



There is variation by voting history on the idea of an income supplement for qualifying unemployed claimants. As Chart 7.3 demonstrates, Conservatives are the least likely group of voters to support the additional income supplement (34%), with the most support coming from Liberal Democrat and SNP voters (both at 44%). Yes/Remain voters are the most likely (47%) referendum voting group to support it and the least likely are No/Leave voters (35%). However, it should be noted that supporting the income supplement is, albeit marginally, the most preferred option of all voting groups.

Chart 7.4. Views of Scots on a prize competition for a small number of unemployed and job seeking benefit claimants who are judged by Jobcentre staff to meet the most demanding conditions around job seeking, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



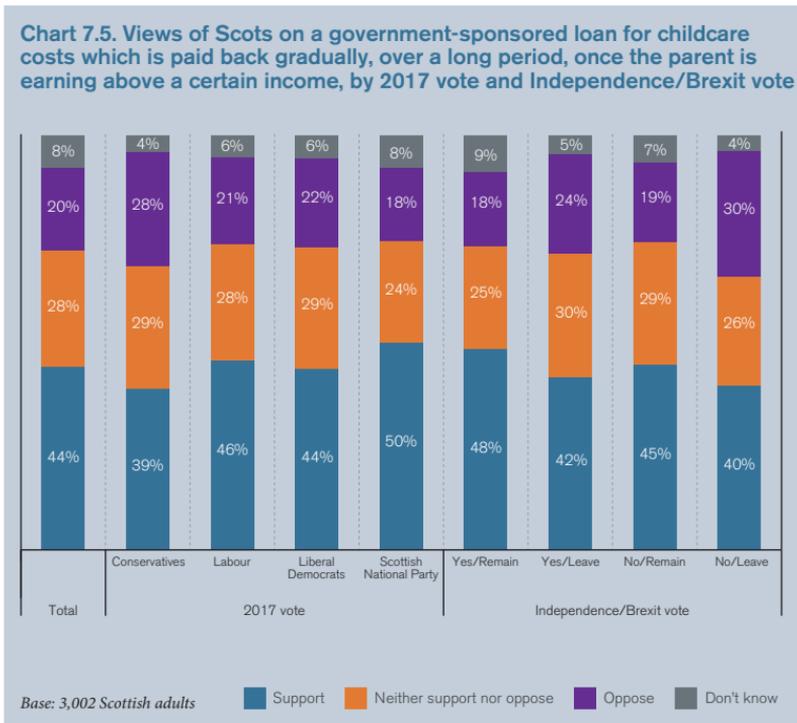
As Chart 7.4 above shows, there is a strong consensus against the prize competition policy amongst all voting groups. There is some minor variation, with Labour (20%) and both Yes/Remain voters and Leavers (20% both) voters being most likely to support it, and Conservatives (16%) and No/Leave voters (14%) being least likely to support it. In fact, amongst all the policy ideas we polled, it stands out as the only one with strong and consistent opposition.

Finally, Scots were polled on the creation of a government-sponsored loan for childcare costs which is paid back gradually, over a long period, once the parent is earning above a certain income. This is a longstanding Bright Blue policy idea.³⁵ This would help to smooth costs

35. James Dobson and Ryan Shorthouse, "Britain breaking barriers", *Bright Blue*, <https://brightblue.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/HumanRights.pdf> (2017), 32.

of childcare for low-income families over a longer timeframe, making it more accessible. Such a proposal would contrast with the current Scottish Government approach, which is expanding the amount of free early learning childcare for two to four year olds in August 2020 from 600 to 1,140 hours in a year.

Scottish public attitudes towards government-sponsored loans for childcare costs are illustrated in Chart 7.5 below.



Government-sponsored loans for children attracted plurality support of 44% in total and also had plurality support in all socio-demographic and voting subgroups. Furthermore, there was very little difference in levels of support between socio-demographic and voting groups. The policy is, somewhat surprisingly, only slightly more popular with parents than with non-parents (45%

versus 42%).

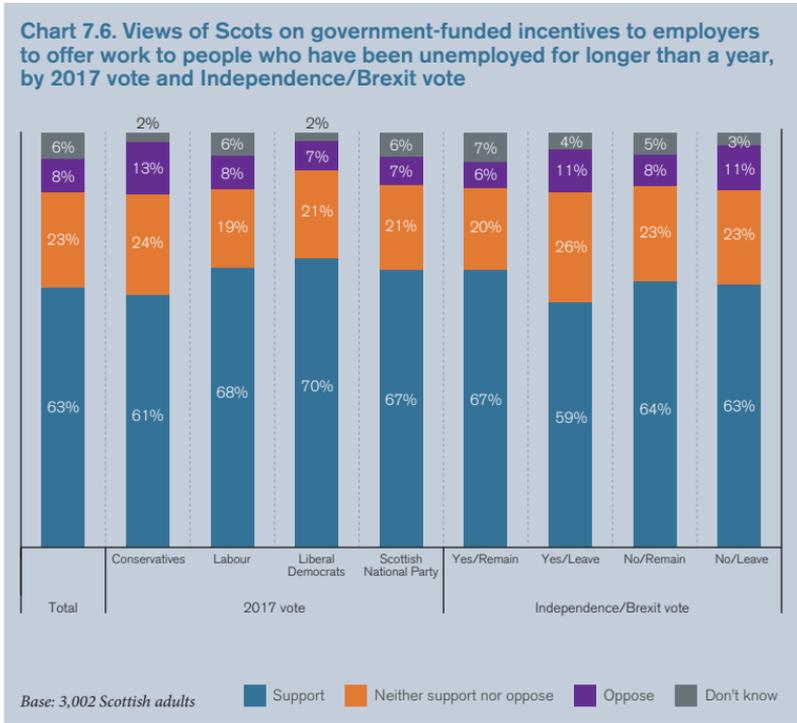
While government-sponsored loans for childcare are least popular with No/Leave voters (40%) and Conservatives (39%), support still outweighs opposition among these groups (28% and 30% respectively). The most likely political groups to support the policy are SNP voters (50%) and Yes/Remain voters (48%).

Employment-related policies

We also assessed Scottish public attitudes towards prominent employment-related policy ideas: the creation of a compulsory employment support scheme for people with disabilities who are able to work; and, a Government-funded incentive to employers to offer work to people who have been unemployed for longer than a year.

Government-funded incentives to employers who offer work for long-term unemployed (63%) and compulsory employment support schemes for people with disabilities (55%) both attract majority support of Scots. This is shown in Charts 7.6 and 7.7 below.

It should be highlighted that there is majority support for both policies amongst all major socio-demographic and voting groups.

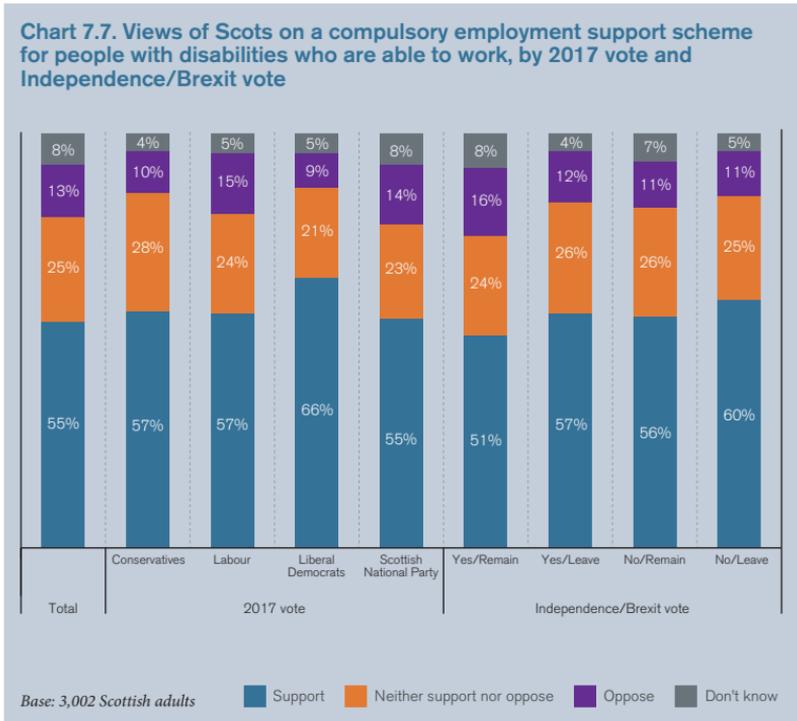


The patterns of socio-demographic views are similar for both policies. Fifty-seven percent of homeowners support a compulsory employment scheme, and 64% support a compulsory employment scheme or Government-funded employer incentive, in comparison to a small proportion of renters (51% and 59% respectively).

Furthermore, those on low incomes are the least likely to support either of these policy ideas, but nevertheless a majority of them still do support them: 52% of those with household incomes of £17,000 or less support a compulsory employment scheme for those with disabilities who are able to work, and 58% support government-funded incentives to employers to offer work to people who have been unemployed for longer than a year. In contrast, a higher proportion (57%) of those with household incomes above £50,000 support a compulsory employment support scheme for those with disabilities and 65% of those with

household incomes above £50,000 support government-funded employer incentives to employers to offer work to people who have been unemployed for longer than a year.

Interestingly, the compulsory employment scheme for those with disabilities also has majority support of 50% amongst those who have direct experience of disability in the household, increasing to 57% for those who do not.



As can be seen from Charts 7.6 and 7.7 above, both of these prominent employment-related policy ideas command majority support across all voting groups. Though still commanding majority support, government-funded incentives to employers to offer work to people who have been unemployed for longer than a year is least popular among Conservatives in terms of party affiliation (61%) and

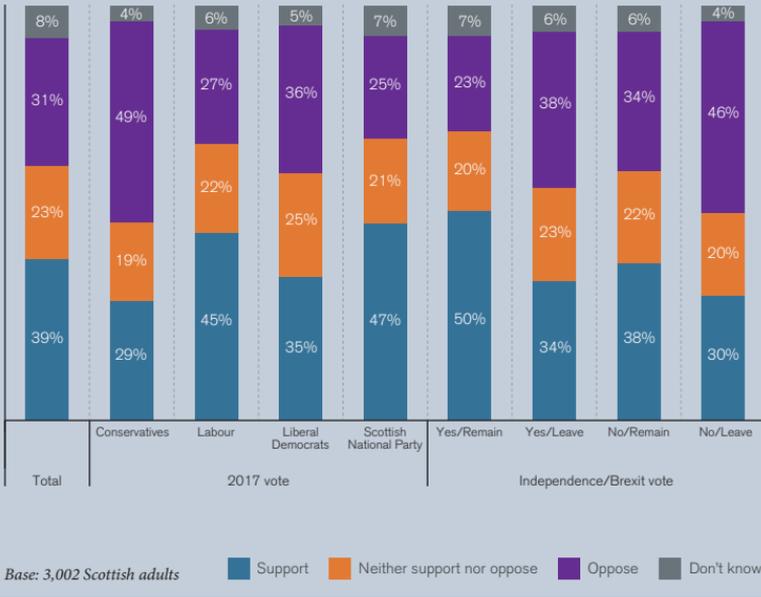
most popular among Liberal Democrats (70%), while a compulsory employment scheme for disabled people is least popular among Scottish National Party voters (55%) and most popular amongst Liberal Democrats (66%).

Government-funded incentives to employers to offer work to people who have been unemployed for longer than a year are similarly popular across the referendum votes, with Yes/Leave voters being least supportive (59%) and Yes/Remain voters being most supportive (67%), whilst a compulsory employment scheme for those with disabilities is least popular among Yes/Remain voters (51%) and most popular among No/Leave voters (60%).

Family-related policies

Scots were polled on whether the current UK two-child limit for benefits for children, which prevents families receiving child-related benefits and tax credits for more than two children, should be ended. The policy was originally introduced by the 2015 UK Conservative Government. Scottish public opinion on this is illustrated in Chart 7.8 below.

Chart 7.8. Views of Scots on ending the two-child limit for benefits for children, which prevents families receiving child-related benefits and tax credits for more than two children, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



Thirty-nine percent of Scots approve of ending the two-child limit for benefits, and 31% are opposed to this. A further 31% said neither or didn't know. There is plurality support for ending the two-child limit among almost all socio-demographic groups, though homeowners (36% support and 35% oppose) and those aged over 55 (37% for both options) are evenly split.

Unsurprisingly, those with children aged under 18 are more likely (46%) than those without children (34%) to approve of ending the two-child limit, while renters (46%) are more likely to support ending the two-child limit compared to homeowners (36%). Finally, while levels of support are relatively similar across age groups, opposition to ending the two-child limit grows from 23% amongst 18 to 34-year olds to 37% for those over the age of 55.

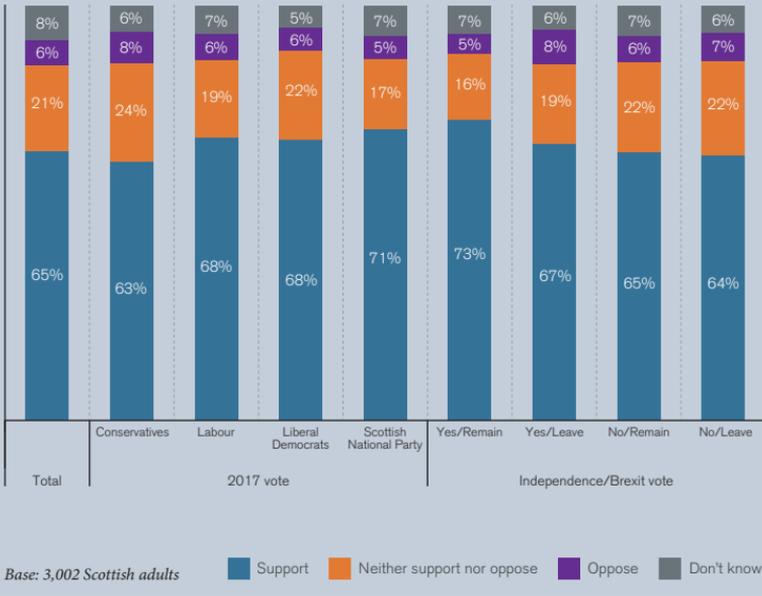
As Chart 7.8 above demonstrates, the voting groups most likely to

approve of the ending of the two-child limit for benefits for children are Yes/Remain voters (50%) and SNP voters (47%). In sharp contrast, Conservatives (49%), Yes/Leave voters (38%) and No/Leave voters (46%) are all more likely to oppose ending the two-child limit than to support. Hence, there is a notable political division in views by voting behaviour, with less consensus than most of the policy ideas proposed in this chapter.

Scots were polled on the policy of allowing full-time carers to keep some of their Carers Allowance if they earn above the current weekly earnings limit of £123. Currently, Carer's Allowance is fully withdrawn if a carer crosses the earnings limit after deductions, effectively creating a cliff-edge. Allowing carers to keep a proportion of the benefit even if they cross the threshold would make the benefit more flexible.

This policy of allowing full-time carers to keep some Carer's Allowance attracted very considerable support: 65% of Scots approve of this proposal and only 6% oppose it, as Chart 7.9 below exemplifies. This makes it the most popular new policy idea that we have tested in this chapter and is firmly in line with high levels of support for increased benefit spending on carers observed in Chapter Two. Once again, majority support is present amongst all socio-demographic and voting groups, indicating the presence of a strong consensus on this policy.

Chart 7.9. Views of Scots on allowing full-time carers to keep some of their Carers Allowance if they earn above the current weekly earnings limit of £123, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



On voting history, as Chart 7.9 above shows, SNP voters (71%) and Yes/Remain voters (73%) are slightly more likely to express support than Conservatives (63%) and No/Leave voters (64%), though these are small differences, and there is still strong majority support across all voting groups for this policy.

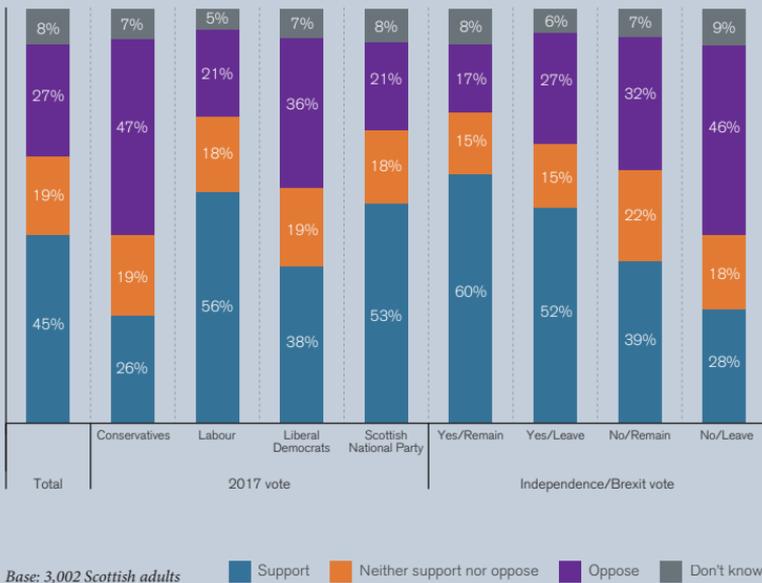
Box 7.1. Universal Basic Income

With the Scottish Government sponsoring feasibility studies of piloting Universal Basic Income (UBI) in four local authorities,³⁶ we have also polled general attitudes towards its introduction.

UBI is a policy where all citizens receive a payment from the government that allows them to meet their basic needs, though implementations of UBI can vary very significantly, and it is unclear what kind of approach would be trialled.

Chart 7.10 exposes Scottish public attitudes towards the introduction of Universal Basic Income.

Chart 7.10. Views of Scots on the introduction of Universal Basic Income, by 2017 vote and Independence/Brexit vote



36. Anthony Painter and Chris Thoung, "Creative citizen, creative state: the principled and pragmatic case for a Universal Basic Income", The RSA, https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/reports/rsa_basic_income_20151216.pdf (2016).

Overall, we find plurality support for UBI (45%), with 27% of Scots opposing and 19% choosing neither of the options. This means that Scots are most likely to support UBI than oppose or be undecided on it.

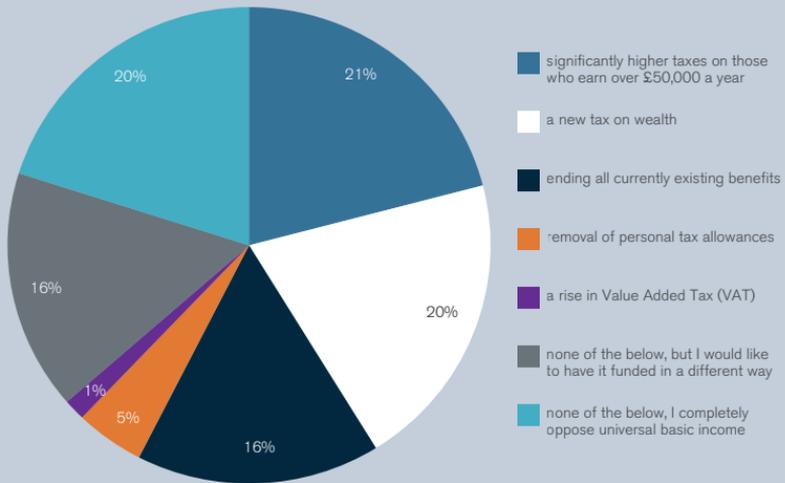
Support is strongest amongst those aged 18 to 34 (60%) but falls to 35% for those over the age of 55. Renters are also much more likely to be supportive of the policy (55%) in contrast to homeowners (41%). Those with direct experience of disability also express majority support (53%) in contrast to those with no direct experience (43%).

The variance by voting history is starker. Only 26% of Conservatives support UBI, while 47% oppose, making them the least likely to support it. In contrast, 56% of Labour and 53% of SNP voters are supportive of it.

Furthermore, while 60% of Yes/Remain voters, who are the most supportive of all voting groups, and 52% of Yes/Leave voters are supportive of UBI, this falls to 39% for No/Remain voters and 28% of No/Leave voters. Hence, while more Scots generally are likely to support UBI, there is no political consensus in contrast to many other SNP Government initiatives.

We wanted to probe attitudes to UBI further and examine attitudes to how Scots would like to see UBI funded, if such a policy was to be introduced fully by the Scottish Government. The results of this are shown in Chart 7.11 below.

Chart 7.11. Views of Scots on ways of funding Universal Basic Income



Base: 3,002 Scottish adults

When probed on the primary method of funding, there was no consensus amongst Scots. The most preferred option was higher taxes on those earning over £50,000 to fund UBI (21%), followed by 20% of Scots preferring a wealth tax, 16% wanting end all existing benefits to fund it, and another 16% picking none of the above when presented with the choices above. In addition, another fifth of the population (20%) stated that they completely opposed UBI.

As expected, the patterns for complete opposition to UBI mirror the above question, with older people, homeowners, those without direct experience of disability, Conservative and No voters being more likely to choose this option.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Scots generally support new and alternative policy ideas that aim to get long-term unemployed and disabled people into work and, in particular, that support carers.

Scots are supportive, but to a lesser degree, of policies aimed at supporting those with children and of supplementary income for certain jobseekers, especially those making an effort to find a job, though not in a form of a prize. There is support for compensating claimants when government social security negligence or error results in hardship, and consensus around the idea of an additional income supplement for those on low incomes based on their National Insurance contributions. Finally, there is plurality Scottish support for the introduction of UBI, though there are also notable divisions in how to fund this.

Overall, views on new policy ideas for the Scottish social security system are not strongly demarcated along socio-demographic or political groups. The two notable exceptions are the introduction of UBI and the ending of two-child limit; both the introduction of UBI and the ending of two-child limit attracts most support from SNP, Labour and Yes/Remain voters and least from Conservatives and No/Leave voters. This emphasises that there is a significant political consensus for a range of new and alternative policies on unemployed, disability and carer welfare provision, indicating that there is room for further reform and improvement of both the devolved security system in Scotland and the overall British welfare system.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The aim of this report was to explore attitudes towards the Scottish social security system, prior to the COVID-19 crisis. We examined the attitudes of Scots towards the purpose and role of the social security system, towards reforms that have been implemented by Westminster and those which are currently being implemented by the Scottish Government, and towards a wide array of potential and alternative future policies. We also considered how these attitudes vary across different socio-demographic and political groups.

The report revealed nine main findings:

- **A clear majority of Scots believe there is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland and that it has increased in the past decade.** Seven in ten Scots believe that there is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland. A firm majority of Scots believe that poverty has increased in the previous decade and almost half believe that it will continue to increase in the next decade. Clearly, there is a major degree of concern about the past, present and future levels of poverty in Scotland. These perceptions are shared across socio-demographic groups, though those who are on lower incomes and those who are renting are slightly more likely to hold these concerns. On the other hand, Conservative voters were notably less likely to be concerned about levels of poverty, though it was still

the most widely held view among these voters that there was quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland.

- **Scots do not believe that the social security system is too generous and most believe any further cuts to it will be damaging to people's lives.** Overall, 64% of Scots agreed that cutting social security would damage too many people's lives, and only 32% agreed that people would be able to support themselves better if benefits were not so generous. Scots are more likely to want social security spending in Scotland generally to be increased, albeit not a majority and there is division on whether such spending should be achieved by raising taxes or spending less on other policy areas. A majority of Scots, however, do believe that social security spending should be increased for particular claimant groups, especially carers and disabled people, but also low-income working parents and those who have previously paid income tax and national insurance for a number of years. There was, nevertheless, more scepticism about additional spending on unemployed claimants, with Scots more likely to think that spending on unemployed people should stay the same. The main variance in views was by voting history, with Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters notably less likely to support increased spending on social security than Labour and SNP voters.
- **A clear majority of Scots want the Scottish Parliament to decide most or all of Scotland's social security policy.** Three in five Scots support the complete or partial devolution of social security in Scotland. While there is major differentiation by political party and independence referendum voting history, it is notable that more than half of Labour (62%) and Liberal Democrat (57%) voters and a significant number of those who voted 'No' in the Scottish Independence Referendum (43%) share this view, while only a small minority (29%) of Conservative voters want most or all of social security policy to be decided by the Scottish Parliament. However, it should be noted that awareness among the Scottish

public of the benefits that are being devolved to Scotland is low, with a majority of Scots not knowing or giving the wrong answer when asked about whether a range of benefits have been devolved or not.

- **Majority of Scots are most likely to think that the social security system should promote personal responsibility, but the Scottish Government's new principles of social security also enjoy majority support.** Majorities for all socio-demographic and voting groups are found for the principle that social security should promote personal responsibility (72% of Scots), but also for other principles commonly associated with centre-right philosophy such as that it should only be a safety net, that social security should be conditional on strict requirements and that those who have paid income tax and NI for a greater number of years should receive greater help. At the same time, a majority of Scots, across most different socio-demographic and voting groups, also supported the principles introduced by the Scottish Government through their ongoing social security reforms, such as that social security is a human right and that it is a public service. Interestingly, most Scots also think social security should help to reduce unequal incomes and that it should be universal, which appear to be in tension with some of the other principles commonly associated with the centre-right which most also support.
- **Most Scots think that the introduction of Universal Credit has been unsuccessful, but also support reforms to increase choice and conditionality in Universal Credit.** Overall, 54% of Scots see the introduction as unsuccessful. Amongst those who hold this sceptical view, a slim majority believes that the idea behind Universal Credit itself is poor as opposed to the implementation of it. Conservative voters were less likely to describe it as unsuccessful, but still only a relatively small minority (15%) of them described it as successful explicitly. Despite this, there was majority support for the presence of conditionality and sanctioning for unemployed

Universal Credit claimants. Scots are also most likely, but not with an overall majority, to support conditionality and sanctioning for other claimant groups, such as parents of young children, the self-employed, and part-time, low-income working people. Both Labour and SNP voters tended to be fairly divided on conditionality and sanctioning measures for different claimant groups, while Conservative voters tended to support them. Furthermore, a majority of Scots support the flexibility introduced via the Scottish Choices for Universal Credit claimants in terms of frequency of payments and the ability to have their housing element paid directly to their landlord. A solid majority of Scots would also like the claimants to have the ability to split their payment across different members of the household, which has been promised but yet to be delivered by the Scottish Government. However, respondents are divided on whether claimants should receive an advance payment to help them deal with the five-week wait as a loan, as is the case or now, or a grant, with the former being preferred by a small margin.

- **Scots are most likely to think it is too hard to apply for disability benefits and support the Scottish Government's reforms to reduce face-to-face assessments, but are indifferent about whether assessments should be conducted by a governmental or private organisation.** Almost half of Scots believe the application process for disability benefits is too demanding. This view is more widespread amongst those on lower incomes and, unsurprisingly, those with a direct experience of disability, with seven in ten amongst the latter group sharing this view. There is also notable variance by voting history, with Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters being less likely to think the application for disability benefits is too difficult than Labour and SNP voters. There is majority support across all socio-demographic and voting groups for the Scottish Government's reform of allowing existing information to be used instead of face-to-face assessments when making disability benefit decisions. However, respondents are

more agnostic about who carries out the assessment service, with more Scots (45%) believing that it does not matter whether a public or a private company is involved, as long as the same process is followed. Although, among the minority expressing a preference, a government agency attracted much higher support than a private company.

- **Scots support the Scottish Government's decision to maintain existing and introduce new devolved benefits for those on low incomes and for children, but support is lower for benefits for children.** There is significant majority support for a range of devolved benefits for those on low income, including for fuel, funeral and childcare costs. There is plurality support for the expansion of various grants offered to low-income parents of young children through the Best Start scheme. A majority of Scots, however, do support introducing the Scottish Child Payment, believing the level of payment is right or too low. Four in ten Scots think that the Scottish Child Payment is set at the right amount of £10 per week for each child, while more than three in ten think that it should be higher. The level of support varies across socio-demographic and voting groups, with younger people, parents, renters, and Labour and SNP voters being more likely to be supportive of new devolved benefits for children.
- **A majority of Scots support alternative policy ideas to improve the Scottish social security system.** Such support is present for the following policies: Bright Blue's idea of an additional income supplement for those on low incomes based on previous National Insurance contributions; Bright Blue's ideas of an establishment of an independent compensation scheme for benefit claimants that have been failed by the DWP, such as on timeliness of benefit payment; a compulsory employment support scheme for people with disabilities who are able to work; government-funded incentives to employers for offering work to long-term unemployed; and, attracting the highest level of

support, allowing carers to keep more of their Carers Allowance depending on their earnings.

- **Scots are more likely to support the introduction of Universal Basic Income (UBI), but not by a majority.** While there is majority support for UBI amongst younger people, renters, and Labour and SNP voters, support is notably lower amongst homeowners, older people and Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters. Amongst the funding options we proposed for UBI, there was a marked lack of consensus, although higher income taxes on those who earn more than £50,000 was the most popular choice.

Variation among socio-demographic and voting groups

It is clear that the socio-demographic and voting characteristics of Scots affect their attitudes towards social security. A number of key characteristics emerge almost always as key markers of differing attitudes to social security. On the other hand, some socio-demographic characteristics appear to be important for varying attitudes to social security only occasionally.

We can divide these socio-demographic and voting characteristics into two groups.

- A **primary group**, which includes characteristics that are consistently associated with differing views towards claimants of social security: age, homeownership, household income, direct experience of disability, 2017 general election vote, Independence referendum vote and Brexit referendum vote.
- A **secondary group**, which includes characteristics that are sometimes associated with differences in attitudes to social security: gender, employment status and parenthood.

These two groups are illustrated in Figure 8.1 below.



It must be stated that many of these characteristics will be correlated, meaning that we cannot attribute a causal relationship between being a member of a specific socio-demographic or having a particular voting history and holding a specific attitude. Household income and homeownership will certainly be linked to political party support, while age has been noted to be an increasingly prominent dividing line for a range of political views, including Scottish Independence, Brexit³⁷ and political party support.³⁸

37. Eleonora Alabrese et al., “Who voted for Brexit? Individual and regional data combined”, *European Journal of Political Economy* (2019), <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0176268018301320>.

38. Gideon Skinner and Dr Roger Mortimore, “How Britain voted in the 2017 election”, *Ipsos MORI*, <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/how-britain-voted-2017-election> (2017).

Furthermore, those on lower incomes and those with direct experience of disability are far more likely to come into contact with the social security system, meaning that their attitudes are likely to be informed not only by the political and media debate, but also by their own experiences.

Conclusion

This report has demonstrated that the social security principles and reforms of the Scottish Government, prior to the COVID-19 crisis, were broadly in line with Scottish public attitudes. But not always. And there is public support for alternative reforms to the Scottish social security system.

As the Scottish Government and Parliament continue to reform social security, it needs to consider repeating this comprehensive and detailed analysis of Scottish public attitudes — so its policies can be shaped and evaluated by the Scottish people.

Annex:

Polling questions

- 1) **Thinking about the current welfare/social security system, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: [Strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree]**
 - If welfare/social security benefits weren't so generous, people would learn to stand on their own two feet
 - Cutting welfare/social security benefits would damage too many people's lives

- 2) **In general, what would be your preference on welfare/social security spending in Scotland?**
 - Increase it, and fund it by raising taxes
 - Increase it, and fund it by spending less on other areas
 - Keep it at the same level
 - Decrease it, and use the saved money to cut taxes
 - Decrease it, and use the saved money to spend more on other areas
 - Don't know

- 3) **Do you think that government spending on benefits for the following groups should increase, decrease or stay about the same? [Should greatly increase, should increase, should stay the same, should decrease, don't know]**
- People who care for those who have a long-term illness or a disability
 - People with disabilities or a long-term illness
 - Low-income parents who are in work
 - Unemployed
 - People who have previously paid income tax and National Insurance for a number of years
- 4) **Some people say there is very little real poverty in Scotland today. Others say there is quite a lot. Which comes closest to your view ...**
- There is very little real poverty in Scotland
 - There is quite a lot of real poverty in Scotland
 - Don't know
- 5) **Over the last 10 years, do you think that poverty in Scotland has ...**
- Increased
 - Stayed the same
 - Decreased
 - Don't know
- 6) **Over the next 10 years, do you think poverty in Scotland will ...**
- Increase
 - Stay the same
 - Decrease
 - Don't know

7) Do you support or oppose the following policies? [Strongly support, tend to support, neither support nor oppose, tend to oppose, strongly oppose, don't know]

- Requiring unemployed benefit claimants to search for work to receive benefit payments
- Sanctioning unemployed benefit claimants if they fail to accept a job offer
- Requiring low-income working benefit claimants to search for more or better paid work to receive benefit payments
- Sanctioning low-income working benefit claimants if they fail to accept an offer of more hours or better paid work
- Requiring low-income parents of a child aged between three and four to work at least 16 hours a week to receive benefit payments
- Requiring self-employed benefit claimants to look for new or additional work if they do not earn a salary equal to working full-time at the minimum wage rate

8) Which of the following principles should and should not apply to the Scottish welfare/social security system? “Welfare / social security ... [Should be a principle, should not be a principle, don't know]

- ... is a human right
- ... is a public service
- ... should help to reduce unequal incomes
- ... should be actively promoted to encourage uptake by those who are eligible
- ... should provide greater help to those who have previously paid taxes and National Insurance for a greater number of years
- ... should be universal
- ... should only be a safety net
- ... should promote personal responsibility

- ... should be provided primarily by family or charity, not the state
 - ... should be conditional on strict requirements before people can claim it
- 9) **Do you support or oppose the existence of a benefit to help people on low incomes with ...? [Strongly support, tend to support, neither support nor oppose, tend to oppose, strongly oppose, don't know]**
- fuel costs during winter, such as Winter Fuel Payment?
 - funeral costs, such as Funeral Expense Assistance?
 - council tax costs, such as Council Tax Reduction?
- 10) **Universal Credit is a new benefit which combines several old benefits, including Jobseeker's Allowance and tax credits. Which of the following comes closest to your view?**
- Universal Credit should reflect the world of work, and be paid only monthly like a salary
 - Universal Credit should account for people's individual circumstances, allowing people to choose how often they are paid, such as weekly or fortnightly
 - Don't know
- 11) **Universal Credit claimants have to wait five weeks before receiving their first benefit payment. Which of the following comes closest to your view?**
- Claimants should be able to receive an early payment as an 'advance', which they have to pay back from their future benefit payments
 - Claimants should be able to receive an early payment as a 'grant', which they do not have to pay back
 - No early payments should be made
 - Don't know

12) In the case of multiple members of the household claiming Universal Credit, it is usually paid to only one member. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- Universal Credit should be paid to one member of the household, who can budget and allocate the money as needed
- Universal Credit should account for individual circumstances of families, and allow households to split their payments between them
- Don't know

13) Universal Credit also replaces Housing Benefit. In the past, recipients could have it be paid directly to their landlord. Which of the following comes closest to your view?

- Claimants should have the option of the housing element of Universal Credit being paid directly to their landlord
- The housing element of Universal Credit should be paid to the claimant, who is then responsible for making payment to their landlord
- Don't know

14) Which of the following would you say best describes your view of the introduction of the Universal Credit?

- Very successful
- Quite successful
- Neither successful not unsuccessful
- Quite unsuccessful
- Very unsuccessful
- Don't know

- 15) **[For those who describe the introduction of Universal Credit as unsuccessful] You mentioned that you think that the introduction of Universal Credit had been unsuccessful. Which of the following best describes your view?**
- The implementation of Universal Credit has been poor but the idea behind it is sensible
 - The idea behind Universal Credit is poor hence why implementation has been difficult
 - Other (please specify)
 - Don't know
- 16) **Which of the following comes closest to your view about how easy or difficult it is to access disability benefits?**
- It is too easy to apply for disability benefits, there are not enough checks to prevent false and fraudulent claims
 - It is too hard to apply for disability benefits, the application process is too demanding and it causes stress and anxiety for claimants
 - It is neither too easy nor too hard to access disability benefits
 - Don't know
- 17) **Currently, applying for adult disability benefits involves a face-to-face assessment with a health professional (a person with professional experience in health or social care) who assesses the applicant's condition and decides if they should receive the benefit. Which of the following policies would you prefer?**
- Almost all applicants should have to undergo a face-to-face assessment before receiving a decision
 - Existing information from sources such as GPs or social care services should be utilised to make a decision, and face-to-face assessments should only be used where existing information is insufficient
 - Don't know

18) And which of the following organisations are best suited to make decisions on whether someone is eligible for disability benefits?

- A government body
- A private company
- It does not matter, as long as the same process is followed
- Don't know

19) Currently, people in receipt of Housing Benefit who live in social housing have their benefits reduced for any spare bedroom they have. This is known as the 'under-occupancy charge', or 'bedroom tax'. Do you support or oppose this policy?

- Strongly support
- Tend to support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Tend to oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know

20) Additional support for families with children which receive certain benefits or tax credits is being introduced. Do you support or oppose any of the following policies? [Strongly support, tend to support, neither support nor oppose, tend to oppose, strongly oppose, don't know]

- A £600 grant on the birth of first child, and £300 grant on the birth of any subsequent children, to help with the costs of having a child. This is known as Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment.
- A £250 grant when a child is 2 to 3 years old to help with the costs of early learning. This is known as Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment.

- A £250 grant when a child is 4 to 5 years old to help with the costs of preparing for school. This is known as Best Start Grant School Age Payment.
 - A £17 supplement that is paid every 4 weeks for pregnant mothers and children under 3 to help with the cost of healthy food. This is known as Best Start Foods.
- 21) **A new income supplement with the aim of reducing child poverty is being introduced, named Scottish Child Payment. This will be given to families who receive certain benefits and tax credits an additional £10 per week for each child they have. Do you think this payment is too high, too low or about right?**
- It is too low, the amount should be higher than £10
 - It is at the right amount
 - It is too high, the amount should be less than £10
 - N/A – A new income supplement should not be introduced at all
- 22) **Universal basic income is a policy where all citizens receive a payment from the government that allows them to meet their basic needs. These payments are paid to individuals with all levels of income and without conditions, no matter their circumstances. In principle, would you support or oppose such a policy?**
- Strongly support
 - Tend to support
 - Neither support nor oppose
 - Tend to oppose
 - Strongly oppose
 - Don't know

23) There are many ways to fund universal basic income. Which, if any, of the following funding options would you like to see?

“A universal basic income funded by ...

- ... ending all currently existing benefits
- ... removal of personal tax allowances
- ... significantly higher taxes on those who earn over £50,000 a year
- ... a new tax on wealth
- ... a rise in Value Added Tax (VAT)
- None of the above, but I would like to have it funded in a different way
- None of the above, I completely oppose universal basic income

24) Now, we will ask about new ideas for the Scottish welfare/social security system. Would you support or oppose... [Strongly support, tend to support, neither support nor oppose, tend to oppose, strongly oppose, don't know]

- An additional income supplement to those on low incomes, based on the number of years of their National Insurance contributions
- A compulsory employment support scheme for people with disabilities who are able to work
- Government-funded incentives to employers to offer work to people who have been unemployed for longer than a year
- An independent compensation scheme for benefit claimants when government causes hardship through negligence and fails to correct their error, such as paying someone's benefits late

- An additional income supplement for unemployed and job seeking benefit claimants who are judged by Jobcentre staff to have bene in long-term unemployment despite having worked hard to find a new job
- A prize competition for a small number of unemployed and job seeking benefit claimants who are judged by Jobcentre staff to meet the most demanding conditions around job seeking
- A government-sponsored loan for childcare costs which is paid back gradually, over a long period, once the parent is earning above a certain income
- Ending the two-child limit for benefits for children, which prevents families receiving child-related benefits and tax credits for more than two children
- Allowing full-time carers to keep some of their Carers Allowance if they earn above the current weekly earnings limit of £123

25) In your view, to what extent should welfare/social security policy in Scotland be decided by the Scottish and UK parliaments?

- It should all be decided by the Scottish Parliament
- Most of it should be decided by the Scottish Parliament
- It should be decided equally by the Scottish and UK Parliaments
- Most of it should be decided by the UK Parliament
- All of it should be decided by the UK Parliament
- Don't know

26) Which of the following welfare/social security benefits do you think are now administered by the Scottish Government, or will be administered by the Scottish Government in the near future? [Currently and/or will be administered by the Scottish Government, Will continue to be administered by the UK Government, Don't know]

- Carer's Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment
- Winter Fuel Payment
- Cold Weather Payment
- Statutory Maternity Pay
- Child Benefit
- Pension Credit
- State Pension



As part of the new devolution settlement, the Scottish Parliament and Government received extensive devolved powers over social security, and they have already made changes to benefits for carers, low-income families, children and those with disabilities. However, there has been little examination of Scottish public attitudes on how social security is being and should be reformed in Scotland.

This report addresses the gap by examining the attitudes of the Scottish public towards the current purpose, role and effectiveness of the social security system, and their views on promised and possible policies for social security reform. It also considers how these views of the Scottish public vary across different socio-demographic and voting characteristics.

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ISBN: 978-1-911128-16-8

