



A GENDER EDIT of the *UK GOVERNMENT SPENDING REVIEW AND AUTUMN STATEMENT 2015*

This document is a 'gender edit' guide to the UK Government's Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015. It includes all extracts that refer directly to women or gender, and selected policy announcements on social security that have significant implications for women and girls in Scotland. Confirmation of established decisions, for instance the triple lock on pensions and restrictions on child tax credit entitlements, are not included. Nor are gendered policy areas that are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, such as social care.

Text in italics denotes our own clarification or commentary. This is a point of departure in our gender edit series, which aims to facilitate access to information and let documents speak for themselves. On this occasion, however, the relevance to women's equality is not necessarily immediately clear.

1. EXTRACTS THAT REFER DIRECTLY TO WOMEN OR GENDER

Spoiler: There is no mention of gender in the Spending Review and Autumn Statement

Employment and earnings [p.8]

"The female employment rate [is] at a record high, with around 975,000 more women in work since the 3 months to April 2010."

VAT on sanitary products [p.40]

"While the government makes the case in the EU for a zero rate of Value Added Tax (VAT) for sanitary products, a new £15 million annual fund equivalent to the VAT raised each year on sanitary products will support women's charities. The government will make an initial donation totalling £5 million to support The Eve Appeal, SafeLives, Women's Aid and The Haven. Further donations and recipients will be announced at Budget 2016. The fund will run over the course of this Parliament, or until the UK can apply a zero rate."

Homelessness [p.42]

"To continue to protect the most vulnerable, the government will increase the funding available to invest in innovative ways of preventing and reducing homelessness, including:

- Providing £40 million for services for victims of domestic abuse, tripling the dedicated funding provided compared to the previous four years and complementing the wider violence against women and girls strategy."

2. POLICIES THAT WILL IMPACT ON WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Spoiler: Equality is not mentioned in the Spending Review and Autumn Statement either

The welfare cap [p.19]

- *The commitment to an overall cap on 'welfare' spending will not be met over the coming years, due to the change of plans to cut tax credits. As twice as many women as men depend on social security, this will signal a temporary reprieve if it is approved by the House of Commons in due course.*

“At the Autumn Statement, the government gives families longer to adjust to the higher wage, lower tax and lower welfare society, by not proceeding with the changes to the tax credit threshold and taper announced at Summer Budget 2015. As a result the OBR’s assessment is that the cap is not met in 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

The government has taken action to ensure the cap is met in the medium term, and the government will retain the welfare cap at the current level.

[...]

Welfare spending within the cap is still set to fall by 1% of GDP over the welfare cap period – consistent with the 1% fall forecast at the Summer Budget.

In line with the requirements of the Charter for Budget Responsibility, and consistent with the Parliamentary accountability for welfare spending intended by the cap, the government will bring forward a debate on a votable motion in the House of Commons.”

A lower welfare society [pp.35-36]

Self-employment

- *Women’s self-employment has risen enormously in recent years, accounting for 88% of newly registered businesses in 2014. The Minimum Income Floor policy is based on unrealistic assumed earnings, so increasing the threshold needed to access financial support will penalise these women.¹*

“The Spending Review and Autumn Statement uprates the individual threshold in the Minimum Income Floor for the self-employed in line with the [National Living Wage] instead of the [National Minimum Wage].”

Housing

- *Around 55% of the housing benefit caseload is accounted for by single women, compared with 25% for single men. Cuts to the housing support budget are therefore gendered, although the extent to which the particular policies below will impact on women is not yet clear. Discretionary Housing Payments, and therefore policy over supported accommodation will be devolved to the Scottish Parliament within the Scotland Bill.*

¹ Engender (2015) [A widening gap: women and welfare reform](#)

“The government will:

Cap the amount of rent that Housing Benefit will cover in the social sector to the relevant Local Housing Allowance, which is the rate paid to private renters on Housing Benefit. This will include the Shared Accommodation Rate for single claimants under 35 who do not have dependent children. This reform will mean that Housing Benefit will no longer fully subsidise families to live in social houses that many working families cannot afford, and will better align the rules in the private and social rented sectors. It will also ensure that Housing Benefit costs are better controlled and will help prevent social landlords from charging inflated rent for their properties. This will apply to tenancies signed after 1 April 2016, with Housing Benefit entitlement changing from 1 April 2018 onwards.

[...]

“Additional Discretionary Housing Payment funding will be made available to local authorities to protect the most vulnerable including those in supported accommodation.”

A society that works: full employment [p.37]

Conditionality

- *Lone parents are already amongst those most targeted by conditionality and affected by sanctions. 95% of lone parents on income support are women. It is not clear how increased conditionality regarding JSA will fall, but welfare reform policies to date have not taken women’s caring roles into account.*

“The Spending Review and Autumn Statement announces further measures to support people into work:

Doing more at the start of a JSA claim to stop people starting a life on benefits – requiring jobseekers to attend the jobcentre weekly for the first 3 months and bringing forward the more intensive support element of the Help to Work programme currently in place for the long-term unemployed.”

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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ABOUT ENGENDER

Engender has a vision for a Scotland in which women and men have equal opportunities in life, equal access to resources and power, and are equally safe and secure from harm.

We are a feminist organisation that has worked in Scotland for 20 years to advance equality between women and men.