

Scotland Act 2016: Part 3: Welfare Benefits and Employment Support SG/UK Joint Senior Officials Group

Proposal and purpose

The Joint Senior Officials Group (JSOG) will sit under the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare (JMWGW), comprising senior officials from the Scottish and UK Governments, to assure the successful implementation of the welfare benefits and employment support provisions of the Scotland Act 2016. This is to encompass the initiation, transition and future joint-working phases.

Remit

The remit of the Group will be:

- support JMWGW discussions;
- to maintain focus on continuity of public services for people in Scotland, and retaining their confidence as a key driver for the work;
- to approve, own and review a joint implementation programme of agreed key milestones and activities to implement the new powers;
- to keep under review the context into which the programme is being delivered, and ensure that the implementation programme recognises other change activity and operational priorities in both the Scottish and UK Governments;
- to take a joint approach to quality assurance of the implementation process and to agree and review how progress towards these milestones should be driven and measured;
- to ensure that adequate resources are made available in each administration to drive forward necessary progress;
- to identify risks to implementation and oversee appropriate mitigating actions;
- to identify, and resolve, any concerns about the implementation process;
- to anticipate, and seek to resolve at an early stage, any arising disputes;
- act as an escalation route for decisions unable to be resolved at an official level;
- where agreement cannot be reached, to advise on appropriate routes for escalation;
- to consider relevant issues in advance of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Welfare and to report to the JMWGW on key assurance activities.

Membership

The membership of the Group is as follows:

Scottish Government

Director of Social Security
DD Social Security Policy Division
DD Social Security Programme and Delivery Division
Director for Fair Work, Employability and Skills
DD Employability Programme Division

UK Government

DWP Strategy, Policy and Analyst Group	Devolution Director/SRO
DWP Scottish Devolution Programme	Programme Director
DWP Operations	Work Services Director, Scotland
Scotland Office	Director / Deputy Director Constitutional Policy

Board members may nominate deputies to attend on their behalf in the exceptional circumstances where they are unable to attend meetings. Similarly, Board members may invite additional attendees where a particular agenda item warrants such attendance. Members of the Group will retain responsibility for the areas of implementation that fall within the competence of their administration, and the existence of the Board does not alter the accountabilities of Senior Responsible Officers in each administration. As members of the Group, however, they will engage to seek to find solutions and resolve difficulties collectively.

Chairing

The Chair of the meeting will alternate between the Director of Social Security from the Scottish Government and the Devolution Director from DWP.

Secretariat

The Secretariat for the JSOG will be jointly provided by the DWP Devolution Programme and the SG Social Security Programme Office. Efforts will be made to keep administration light.

Minutes will be written promptly after each meeting, by officials from the Government of the Director chairing the meeting and then cleared by officials from both governments. Cleared minutes will be circulated within one week of the meeting. The meetings will generally alternate between being in London or Edinburgh.

These Terms of Reference will be published online.

Frequency of meetings

The Group will meet at least quarterly, and more frequently as SG policy develops and/or to meet at least as frequently as the JMWGW. The frequency of meetings may be reviewed in line with business need.

Progress reporting and quality assurance

The Group will review progress against the agreed milestones at each meeting. Where change/delay is envisaged, the Group will receive an interim exception report.

Members of the Group, and notably those representing interested parties, will expect to be notified of any arising disputes together with efforts being made to resolve these disputes, at the earliest possible stage. In the event of failure to resolve the issue locally, the dispute will be reported to the wider Group for consideration.

Where appropriate, the Group may ask the Secretariat to prepare, or seek from relevant third parties (notably the Office of Budget Responsibility) a more detailed report to support quality assurance.

The Secretariat will make arrangements for the SROs of relevant programmes and other senior officials to attend meetings of the Group as appropriate.

Sub-groups of the Group

The Group may establish sub-groups with member from both the Scottish and UK Governments to focus on particular programmes or areas of welfare delivery, and provide assurance to the main Group on progress of implementation activity.

Review

These Terms of Reference can be amended, rewritten or supplemented as agreed by JSOG members.