

SOCIAL SECURITY

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Social Security Advisory Committee: Business Plan 2014-15

Social Security Advisory Committee: Chair's Foreword



This is the Social Security Advisory Committee's Business Plan for 2014-15 which sets out our strategic objectives for the year ahead.

The Committee has been through a period of considerable change during the past two years, not least in terms of the Committee's membership. We have said goodbye to several of our most experienced members as they reached the end of their maximum terms. We have, however, built a strong new team with a broad range of experience that enables us to consider issues from all perspectives. New recruitment in spring 2014 will further strengthen the team by appointing members with a detailed knowledge of social security law.

My expectation is that the next year will be a demanding one. Experience tells us that the amount of secondary legislation brought forward in years leading up to a General Election is generally greater than the intervening ones, so we anticipate that our work volumes in 2014-15 will be high. Additionally our second Triennial Review is due in February 2015. Based on the achievements of the last year I am confident that we are well placed to respond positively and effectively to the challenges and opportunities that arise in the coming year, and following the General Election in May 2015.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Paul Gray". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Paul Gray

About Us

The Committee has, by statute, a vital role to play in scrutinising detailed and complex regulations and expressing its views to Ministers and Parliament. We also have an important role in identifying and commenting on wider issues in social welfare through our independent work programme.

Established in 1980, we are an independent statutory body that provides advice on social security and related matters.

Our main responsibilities are to:

- perform a mandatory scrutiny of most of the proposed regulations that underpin the social welfare system on behalf of the Secretary of State for both DWP and Parliament; and to
- provide advice and assistance to the Secretary of State, whether in response to a specific request or on our own initiative.

Advice offered formally by us in relation to proposals for legislation must be published by the Secretary of State, along with the Government's response to our conclusions and recommendations. There is no obligation upon the Secretary of State to respond to other forms of advice from the Committee, or to act upon any of the advice we offer.

We perform a similar role for the Department for Social Development (DSD) in Northern Ireland.

About Us

In addition to the scrutiny of proposals for legislation, we have general advisory functions. For example, where resources permit, we:

- informally scrutinise regulations that are exempt from our statutory scrutiny;
- respond to public consultation exercises conducted by Government and others where we believe that we can add value;
- respond to specific requests for advice from Ministers and officials;
- undertake our own detailed studies as part of our independent work programme;
- provide comment on a range of draft guidance and communications produced by the DWP and HMRC.

We also have a non-statutory role offering advice to Treasury Ministers and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) on tax credits, National Insurance, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance.

We are supported by a small Secretariat (currently 4.6 people headcount). This is funded from the Committee's budget, with the exception of one post which is funded by HM Revenue and Customs.

Our Overall Aims

Our two main priorities for 2014-15 are to:

- Undertake impartial, effective and timely scrutiny of draft regulations relating to social security benefits.
- Provide impartial, well-informed and constructive advice to the Secretary of State on issues relating to social security and welfare reform.

The exact volume of work flowing from this statutory role is largely outside our control as it is dictated by the level of Government legislative activity and the nature of the proposals brought forward. Our statutory role takes priority over any other activity undertaken by the Committee. As set out in the Chair's Foreword we anticipate that our work volumes in 2014-15 will be high.

Our Objectives

There are a number of specific activities which we intend to focus upon in the year in order to be more effective in delivering our priorities. In particular, we aim to:

- continue to strengthen our constructive engagement with DWP on a regular basis to ensure that draft regulations, and the appropriate supporting explanatory material, are of high quality and presented to the Committee for consideration in an appropriate and timely manner;
- continue to broaden the range of our stakeholders and develop more active engagement with them to ensure that our advice to Ministers is well-informed and takes account of a wide range of perspectives;
- ensure that we have a good understanding of the potential challenges and opportunities that might arise following the General Election in 2015, so that we are prepared for the legislative programme that is likely to follow;
- continue our rolling annual programme of appropriate and timely research projects for the Committee's independent work programme, with a minimum of two projects to be completed within each year (subject to resources). The planned projects for 2014-15 include a study on self-employment trends and their implications for social security;

- review our past recommendations on a regular basis to ensure that they are still relevant.
- continue to bring together policy makers, think tanks, local authorities, the third sector and academia to discuss a range of welfare issues and seek input to our reviews through two stakeholder events – one of which will be outside London;
- make a continuing effort to be inclusive of stakeholders in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to ensure that their voice is heard in the advice we provide to Ministers;
- continue to review our programme of DWP visits to ensure that we understand the operational issues that are likely to flow from new policy initiatives, and are able to review progress of the implementation of Universal Credit and the Personal Independence Payment;
- contribute to DWP's evaluation process, as a member of DWP's Methodology and Design Steering Group and External Stakeholder User Group, as the implementation of Universal Credit rolls out more widely;
- continue to strengthen our interaction with relevant stakeholders via greater and more targeted use of a range of communication channels;

- continue to build our links with HMRC and the Treasury under our [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to ensure that due account is taken of the role of those Departments in relation to benefit matters, particularly in the transition to Universal Credit;
- continue to scrutinise regulations from an equality perspective through the Department's equality analyses, and ensure that diversity and equality are reflected in the Committee's other activities (including its recruitment exercises);
- fully participate in the second Triennial Review of the Committee in February 2015, and demonstrate that we have made good progress against the recommendations from the previous one;
- continue to strengthen the Committee by ensuring we have a robust induction programme for new members appointed in this year;
- continue to utilise our resources effectively, and in a cost conscious manner.

Our Operating Principles

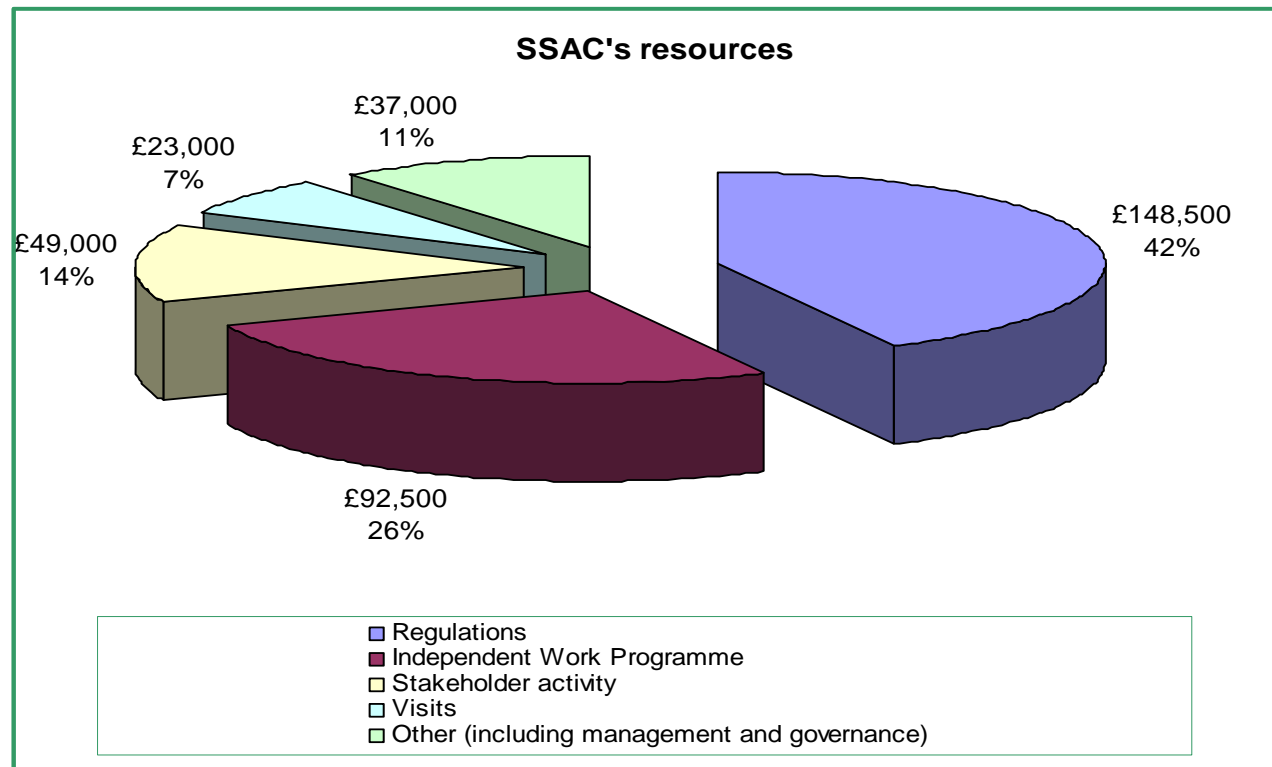
Whilst undertaking our activities we will be conscious of our responsibilities for prudent management, confidentiality where appropriate, transparency and quality governance in accordance with the [DWP/SSAC Framework Agreement](#).

We will publish an annual report on our website in 2015 showing how we performed against those objectives.

We regularly assess our risks and have mitigating strategies in place to deal with them. In particular in this Business Plan period, we will be reviewing the potential risks for us arising from our ability, on a modest budget, to engage in a high quality independent work programme whilst carrying out our regulation scrutiny and responding to Ministerial commissions.

Our Resources

Our budget for 2014-15 is £350,000. Unlike many independent arm's length bodies, we are a demand-led organisation and much of our core scrutiny function is determined by the Government. It is, therefore, difficult to forecast our expenditure accurately at the start of the year as the reality is that we have to keep it under regular review throughout the course of the year so that we are able to respond effectively to emerging priorities. However, based on our activities during 2013-14 and what we already know about our priorities in the coming year, we currently anticipate that our resources are likely to be deployed broadly as follows:



Our Organisation¹

Committee Membership

Paul Gray (Chair)

Les Allamby^{2, 3}
John Andrews^{5, 6}
Simon Bartley
Adele Baumgardt
John Ditch⁷
Keith Faulkner⁸

Colin Godbold^{4, 6}
Chris Goulden³
Matthew Oakley³
Nicola Smith³
Diana Whitworth⁶
Jim McCormick⁹

Committee Secretariat

Denise Whitehead (Secretary)

James Evans¹⁰
Paul Mackrell

Matthew Moon
Dean Walton

Victoria Todd¹¹ (Adviser on HMRC issues)

¹ As at 1 April 2014

² Deputy Chair of the Social Security Advisory Committee

³ Member of the Independent Work Programme sub-group

⁴ Member of SSAC's HMRC sub-group

⁵ Chair of SSAC's HMRC sub-group

⁶ Member of SSAC's Stakeholder and Communications sub-group

⁷ Chair of SSAC's Independent Work Programme sub-group

⁸ Chair of SSAC's Stakeholder and Communications sub-group

⁹ The Committee's Expert Adviser on Scotland

¹⁰ Research and Policy Specialist

¹¹ Unpaid secondment from Chartered Institute of Taxation

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