



Social Security Advisory Committee: Business Plan 2019-20



Chair's foreword

I am delighted to present the Social Security Advisory Committee's (SSAC's) business plan for 2019-20 which sets out our strategic objectives for the year ahead, and how we will measure our success against them.

This business plan makes clear the Committee's commitment to deliver against our statutory obligations and provide advice on vital social security matters that is relevant, well-informed and supported by a clear evidence base. In doing so, we will:

- work constructively and collaboratively with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP);
- engage effectively with our stakeholders throughout the UK;
- ensure through visits and consultations that our advice reflects current experience and practice from the front-line; and
- undertake our work in an efficient, cost-conscious and transparent manner.

Over the course of this year we look forward to welcoming new colleagues, including a Committee Chair. As we build our new team we will have an excellent opportunity to reflect on what we are doing well and identify areas where we might further strengthen our performance. The findings of the independent tailored review of SSAC,¹ taken together with an internal effectiveness review that we will undertake during the year, will provide invaluable evidence for us to consider as we start that process.

We look forward to responding positively and effectively to the challenges and opportunities that arise in the coming year, and I am confident that we are well placed to do so.

Liz Sayce OBE
Interim Chair

¹ Expected in autumn 2019



About Us

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

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

Our main responsibilities are to:

- perform a mandatory scrutiny of most of the proposed regulations that underpin the social security system on behalf of the Secretary of State, for the benefit of both DWP and Parliament;
- 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 secondary 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 Communities in Northern Ireland.

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.



About us

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

- undertake our own detailed studies as part of our independent work programme;
- 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;
- provide comment on some of the key pieces of draft guidance and communications produced by the DWP and/or HMRC.

We are supported by a small secretariat. This, along with our other running costs, is funded from the Committee's budget of £350,000.



Our overall aims

Our two main priorities for 2019-20 remain to:

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

Our statutory role takes priority over any other activity undertaken by the Committee.

The level of Government secondary legislation has traditionally accounted for the majority of the Committee's activity. However, the volume of draft regulations being presented to the Committee has significantly decreased over the past year or so. This provides an opportunity to reflect on how we can most effectively support the Secretary of State by providing more proactive and timely advice on a number of priority areas, initially focusing on the implementation challenges that remain in Universal Credit. As a starting point we intend to examine the following issues during this year: consent, Universal Support, payment flexibilities, and the transfer of tax credit debt.



Our objectives

There are a number of specific activities on which we intend to focus during 2019-20 in order to be more effective in delivering our priorities. In particular, we aim:

- to work constructively and effectively with DWP - at both Ministerial and official level - to ensure that our respective roles in the delivery of high quality draft regulations are delivered well and in a timely manner;
- to 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 2019-20;
- to review our past recommendations on a regular basis for continued relevance and to ensure that the impact of our reports is understood;
- to develop more active and targeted stakeholder engagement to ensure that our advice to Ministers is well-informed, takes account of a wide range of perspectives and provides constructive support to the policy-making process;
- to undertake a programme of visits to DWP sites and other stakeholders ensure that we understand the operational issues that are likely to flow from new policy initiatives and are able to review the progress of the implementation of Universal Credit;



Our objectives (continued)

- 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 and that the impact of greater devolution – including city devolution and localisation - of social security provision is understood;
- to further strengthen our links with HMRC and the Treasury under our [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to ensure that due account is taken of their role in relation to benefit matters, particularly in the transition of tax credits to Universal Credit;
- to further strengthen our understanding of the impact of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union on social security, and be prepared for any draft regulations arising from that;
- to scrutinise regulations from an equality perspective through the Department's equality analyses, and proposing ways that the differential impact of draft regulations on different groups of people can be assessed. We will also ensure that diversity and equality are reflected in the Committee's other activities (including its recruitment exercises and engagement with stakeholders);
- to benchmark ourselves against other organisations of a similar size and/or remit, and identifying areas of best practice; and
- to make the best use of our people and financial resources, and in a cost conscious manner. The effective induction of incoming Committee members and a new Chair will be a priority for us.



Measuring our success

We will report on the degree to which we have achieved these objectives in our 2019-20 Annual Report. Our success criteria will include:

- Rigorous scrutiny of draft regulations within agreed deadlines.
- Provision of pertinent, well informed and influential advice to Ministers, informed by our stakeholders' experience, expertise and other evidence.
- Seeking feedback from our stakeholders on the usefulness of our work (both scrutiny of regulations and our independent work programme) and advice to Ministers;
- Strong engagement and collaboration with the DWP, HM Revenue and Customs, Department for Communities Northern Ireland and other appropriate Government and devolved bodies.
- Transparency about the Committee's operation and expenditure, including publication of our minutes and reports, the fees and expenses for each Committee member, and the costs of our secretariat.
- Undertaking an in-year effectiveness review of the Committee.



Our operating principles

Whilst undertaking our activities we will be conscious of our responsibilities for:

- prudent management
- cost conscious management of our budget of £350,000²
- confidentiality where appropriate
- transparency
- quality governance in accordance with the [DWP/SSAC Framework Agreement³](#) and the [Partnerships between departments and arm's length bodies code of good practice](#)
- regular assessment of risks, and ensuring plans are in place for managing them

² Approx £220,000 of which relates to staffing costs.

³ Reviewed by DWP/SSAC in spring 2017



Our Organisation⁴

Committee Membership

Sir Ian Diamond (Committee Chair)⁵

Bruce Calderwood⁶

David Chrimes⁷

Carl Emmerson

Phil Jones⁸

Chris Goulden

Jim McCormick⁹

Gráinne McKeever¹⁰

Dominic Morris

Seyi Obakin¹¹

Charlotte Pickles

Liz Sayce¹²

Victoria Todd¹³

Committee Secretariat

Denise Whitehead (Committee Secretary)

Paul Mackrell (Assistant Secretary)

Nishan Jeyasingam (Business Support)

⁴ As at 1 April 2019

⁵ Professor Ian Diamond stood down from the Committee on 6 August 2019 following his appointment as the National Statistician. Liz Sayce has been appointed interim Chair.

⁶ Chair of SSAC's Independent Work Programme sub-committee

⁷ Represents the interest of workers

⁸ Represents the interests of Wales, and business

⁹ Chair of SSAC's Communications and Stakeholder Engagement sub-committee, and represents the interests of Scotland

¹⁰ Chair of SSAC's Postal Regulations sub-committee, and represents the interests of Northern Ireland

¹¹ Represents the interests of BAME

¹² Vice Chair, and represents the interests of disabled and chronically ill people

¹³ Chair of SSAC's HMRC sub-committee



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