

THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SSAC) - FACTSHEET

The SSAC is an Independent Statutory Body, funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It is the main UK advisory body on social security and related matters, such as links with the labour market and wider social welfare issues. The Committee provides advice to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and to the Department in Northern Ireland with responsibility for social security – the Department for Social Development - on their functions generally, and it plays a unique role in the secondary legislation process. Here it performs a mandatory scrutiny of most proposals for making the regulations that underpin the social welfare system that is the responsibility of the DWP. Thus, much of the Department's day-to-day business - including the progressing of the welfare reform agenda - comes before the Committee.

In addition to the scrutiny of proposals for legislation, the Committee's general advisory functions have developed over its twenty-nine year existence to take in commentary on operational matters (especially in relation to the 'customer/consumer' interest) and, most recently, oversight of the Department's public information strategy, including detailed examination of individual information products. A programme of visits allows the Committee to develop a greater understanding of the realities of the Department's work and the impact 'on the ground' of the regulations it scrutinises.

The Committee responds to most of the Department's public consultation exercises, and is also consulted separately by Ministers seeking views on specific issues. The Committee may, of its own volition, select issues to research and report upon, and it publishes the resulting 'Occasional Papers' on its website. The Chairman and/or the Committee meet regularly with Ministers and senior officials to discuss issues of the moment. Members also meet front-line staff and customers in the course of their visits to operational sites

The Committee publishes an annual account of its activities generally. Advice offered formally in relation to proposals for legislation must be published by the Secretary of State, along with his response to the Committee's views and recommendations

The Committee is independent of both Government and sectional interests. Members come from a variety of backgrounds, but collectively they have a considerable depth of knowledge of, and expertise in, both the specifics of policy and law and the wider social policy agenda. The Committee is well-known in the social policy field and is well regarded and respected by sectional interests, members of both Houses, and the Select Committee (in 2003, the Select Committee published a report - number HC 296 - on the SSAC).

The most recent Quinquennial Review of the Committee was completed in 2003/4, and the very positive report of the Review - confirming that SSAC will continue to operate under the current statutory remit – was published in May 2004.

History and legislative basis

The current legislation governing SSAC is The Social Security Administration Act 1992 Section 170 et seq and Schedule 5.

The SSAC was formed in 1980 to take over the advisory functions of the Supplementary Benefits Commission and the role of the National Insurance Advisory Committee. In 1982 it took on the functions of Advisory Council on Rent and Rate Rebates – subsequently replaced by Housing Benefit. In April 1999 responsibility for National Insurance Contributions passed to the Inland Revenue and SSAC's formal remit ended. In October 1999 Family Credit and Disability Working Allowance were replaced by Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit - again, responsibility passed to the Inland Revenue, and SSAC's formal remit for these areas ended. However, an informal consultation process for these matters was established in 2001, and subsequently strengthened, following the conclusion of the Quinquennial Review in 2004 when the Committee began giving advice in confidence to Treasury ministers. The latter arrangement was reviewed in 2008 and the 'confidentiality' provision was removed. A new Memorandum of Understanding to govern this work was agreed in January 2009.

Reports and recommendations

Currently, around 10% of proposed changes to regulations are reported upon. It is customary for the Committee to run a public consultation exercise to seek the views of interested organisations and individuals on the proposals to be reported upon. The Committee Secretariat maintains an extensive database of contacts to whom details of consultation exercises are sent automatically, as well as being made available (with an electronic response facility) on the SSAC website www.ssac.org.uk .

Reports must be published by the Secretary of State when regulations are laid, together with his response to any recommendations. The publication generally takes the form of a Command Paper. Around 60% of the Committee's recommendations are accepted

The general advice function may be exercised through questions referred to the SSAC by the Secretary of State, or of Committee's own volition. For example, in 2000, the Committee accepted Secretary of State's invitation to provided ongoing advice on the Department's public information strategy, and in 2004 undertook to provide advice on the re-shaping of the 'living together' test for benefits, in anticipation of the advent of Civil Partnerships. From 2006, the Committee's role in relation to regulations made within six months of the enactment of new primary legislation has been strengthened, and the Committee also advises on complexity in the benefits system.

Membership

Legislation requires not less than 10 members or more than 14 including the Chairman.

All appointments by Secretary of State for 3 years (renewable) but with some constraints:

- one after consultation with organisations representative of employers
- one after consultation with organisations representative of workers
- one disabled and/or representing interests of disabled people
- one after advice from Northern Ireland

plus (by custom) at least:

- one member from Wales
- one member from Scotland
- one ethnic minority member

Meetings

Meetings are normally held on the first Wednesday of each month, in London. Members are fee paid for attendance at Committee meetings. The Chairman is paid £21,849 pa, and members receive a fee of £253per a day. Travel expenses are also paid. The annual budget (including staff costs) for 2007/8 was around £430,000.

Secretariat

Staffed by up to 6 officials on loan from the Department for Work and Pensions and HMRC.

Membership of the Committee

Sir Richard Tilt joined the Prison Service in 1966 as a graduate entrant, and worked in a variety of prison establishments before governing Bedford and Gartree prisons. From 1990 he worked in Prison Service HQ, first as Head of Industrial Relations, then as Director of Services. In 1994 he was appointed Director of Security, and in the same year he became Director-General. He retired from the Prison Service in 2000. He was an NHS Chair for six years and is the Social Fund Commissioner. In 2007 he was appointed to chair the Independent Complaints Panel for the Portman Group (Alcoholic Drinks Industry Regulation). He is a governor of de Montfort University. He was a Churchill Fellow in 1991 and was knighted in 1999.

Kwame Akuffo is Chair of Ealing Racial Equality Council and also Chair of the free law clinic, Community Advice Programme (CAP). He is co-founder of the Equality and Human Rights Centre West London and has been a law teacher since 1982. He is currently a Senior Lecturer at Ealing Law School, Thames Valley University. His research interests and publications are in International Human Rights, Trusts and International and Comparative Law. He is engaged in issues of equality, diversity and cohesion in Ealing where he has also worked for many years in community relations and community legal service delivery. He is a JP and a member of the Family Panel. He served as a member of the Independent Monitoring Board at HMP Wormwood Scrubs until 2004.

Les Allamby is Director of Law Centre (NI). He is a solicitor and sociology and social administration graduate. He is a social security adviser involved in advocacy before the Social Security Commissioner, and with taking cases to the ECJ and ECHR on social security issues. He is currently a member of the Legal Services Commission in Northern Ireland and from 2006, was a member of the Legal Services Review Group in Northern Ireland. From 1999-2004 he was the Chairperson of the Standards Committee for Northern Ireland, reporting on the quality of decision making for social security and child support. He has written widely on legal and social policy issues. He has also served as an election monitor and supervisor in Bosnia and Pakistan, Pakistan and Georgia.

John M Andrews OBE is Chairman and founder of the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group (LITRG), a charitable initiative by the Chartered Institute of Taxation to give a voice to the unrepresented in the tax/tax credits systems. LITRG also founded Tax Help for Older People (TOP) which has 650 volunteers giving pro bono tax help to low income pensioners through telephone help and face to face delivery. He has a particular interest in the ways that the DWP and HMRC might work together to provide a better, joined-up service to their most vulnerable customers. He has been involved as a full-time volunteer in the charity sector for the past dozen years and was awarded an OBE in 2003 for his charitable services. In an earlier life he was the national Head of Tax at Coopers&Lybrand (now PricewaterhouseCoopers) and was an author of a number of tax books.

Simon Bartley is Chief Executive of UK Skills. He was educated at Durham University where in 1979 he graduated with a BSc in Engineering Science and Management and in 1985 with an MSc in Management Science. Simon is a Chartered and a European Engineer, a Member of both the Institution of Civil Engineers and of CIBSE and is a Fellow of the Institution of Engineering Technology and of the City & Guilds of London Institute. He

is Chair of SummitSkills, the Sector Skills Council for the Building Services Engineering Sector which covers the electrotechnical, heating, ventilating, air conditioning, refrigeration and plumbing industries, a Member of The City & Guilds Council and a Director of the Centre for Enterprise. Simon's other business representations include him being a past Chair of the CBI's Small and Medium Enterprise Council. He currently Chairs both the 14-19 Diploma Steering Group for Construction and the Built Environment and the BSI SME Policy and the BSI Standards and Policy Committees. Simon is Chair of Providence Row Charity, a Charity for the homeless in the East End of London.

Brigid Campbell OBE studied Classics before entering the civil service, working mainly with expert advisory committees in the medical field. She subsequently underwent teacher training, spent five years in a Citizens Advice Bureau, and went on to study law and qualify as a solicitor. After a short spell in practice, she joined the teaching staff of The College of Law and became the College's Head of Welfare Law, co-authoring the student textbook used for the Legal Practice course. She was appointed to the Independent Tribunal Service (now The *Tribunals* Service) in 1995, and sits as a part-time Chair, with particular experience in disability and incapacity appeals. Since retiring from the College of Law in 2000 she has returned to Citizens Advice, where she works mainly in social policy.

Angus Erskine is a freelance research and policy consultant. He has been a lecturer at the Universities of Stirling, Glasgow and Edinburgh and the, then, Sunderland Polytechnic. He has many years of experience working with local area-based anti-poverty initiatives. He is particularly interested in social security delivery in rural areas and the rights of citizens. He was Chair of the Editorial Board of the Journal of Social Policy and Review Editor for the Journal of Social Policy. He has researched and written on social security, employment, social exclusion and poverty and co-edited *The Student's Companion to Social Policy* and *The Dictionary of Social Policy*.

Alison Garnham is joint-Chief Executive of the Daycare Trust, taking up her position in June 2006. Prior to this, for nine years she was the Director of Policy and Research at One Parent Families. She worked for many years as a welfare rights adviser and for a number of women's organisations before, in 1989, joining the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) where she co-authored a number of publications about the Child Support Act. She has subsequently written about lone parenthood and child poverty, including an edition of *Poverty: the Facts*, published by CPAG. Before joining One Parent Families she was Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of North London (now London Metropolitan University) where she remains an Honorary Research Fellow.

Carolyn George is a freelance writer and trainer and has worked in the welfare rights field for nearly 30 years. She has worked in the Citizens' Rights Office at Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), with Citizen's Advice and with other advice organisations, giving advice both to members of the public and to other advisors. She has been a part-time lecturer in Law at the University of Northumbria (1994-2003), including supervising students in its Student Law Office. She is an experienced advocate and was part of CPAG's legal team. She was a lay member of the Social Security Appeal Tribunal Panel (1984-1999). Carolyn has extensive experience in providing training and information. She is an author of CPAG's *Housing Benefit and Council Tax Legislation* and the *Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits Handbook* and has contributed to a large number of other publications.

Professor Elaine Kempson CBE is Professor of Personal Finance and Social Policy Research and Director of the Personal Finance Research Centre at the University of Bristol. She is an internationally known and respected authority on consumer financial issues, and has over 20 years experience in conducting research into various aspects of personal financial services. In recent years, this has included a large body of work on access to financial services and financial inclusion, over-indebtedness, and the need for financial education. Elaine was appointed as the first independent reviewer of the UK Banking Codes in 2002 and was reappointed to review the Codes again in 2004. She is a member of the BERR advisory group on over-indebtedness and HM Treasury's Financial Inclusion Taskforce. She is also a non-executive director of the Financial Ombudsman Services and was, until recently, a non-executive director of the Banking Code Standards Board. In 2007 Elaine was awarded a CBE for services to the Financial Services Industry.

Maureen Reith is a social worker with over nineteen years experience. She has provided a social work service over the years to all client groups including childcare, criminal justice and learning disabilities. Since 1995, she has specialised in community care, providing a service to individuals, carers and families affected by disability. One of many roles included working with the Independent Living Fund (ILF) as a Social Work Assessor. Ms Reith is registered with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and was appointed as a Mental Health Officer in 2003. In 2005, Ms Reith was appointed and continues to serve as a General Member of the Mental Health Tribunal Service for Scotland. Ms Reith's interest in SSAC stemmed from her experience in social work, which provided her with a unique insight into the impacts and effects of social welfare provisions on the public.

Pat Smail is a research consultant and partner in Focus Consultancy, undertaking social research and evaluations across the public and charitable sectors. She has been a non-executive director of Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust for ten years; she currently holds special responsibilities for children's services and sustainability. She is a registered social worker and has worked in both Wales and England, primarily in children and family services. She is past Chair of MIND Monmouthshire and retains an interest in mental health policy. Her current research interests include severe child poverty, children and young people's participation in decision-making and community regeneration. She takes a particular interest in equality and diversity issues.

Professor Janet Walker is Emeritus Professor of Family Policy in the Institute of Health and Society at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Until 2005 she was director of the Newcastle Centre for Family Studies. She has led over 45 studies in the fields of marriage and divorce, parenting, criminal justice and services for children. She has been an expert consultant to the Council of Europe and a non-executive Director of Newcastle City NHS Trust where she was responsible for dealing with complaints from the public and overseeing services for the elderly. She is Vice-Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Family and Parenting Institute and Trustee of the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and of the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences.

Professor Robert Walker is Professor of Social Policy, University of Oxford and Fellow of Green Templeton College. He has devoted his career to informing policy advance on issues related to social security, poverty and social exclusion in Britain and elsewhere through the assembly and dissemination of evidence and by direct engagement in the

policy process. After a spell in the civil service, he worked at the Universities of Kent and York before directing the Centre for Research in Social Policy at Loughborough University and becoming Professor of Social Policy, University of Nottingham. He has undertaken over 60 research projects and published 18 books including '*Social Security and Welfare*' (OUP-McGraw-Hill, 2005). He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.