

**JOINT STATEMENT FROM SCOTTISH POVERTY ALLIANCE,  
STAKEHOLDERS & STUC ON GOVERNMENT GREEN PAPER ON  
INCAPACITY BENEFIT REFORM**

**SUPPORT NOT SANCTIONS**

Whilst we recognise the need to simplify the Incapacity Benefit (IB) system, to provide more support to those who need it, and welcome an approach that shows that people with disabilities or long term illnesses are not 'written off', as a consortium of anti-poverty organisations in Scotland, we are concerned about many of the aspects in the UK Government's Green Paper on Welfare Reform.

Current benefit levels are inadequate. Poverty cannot be eradicated where the level of benefit is less than the poverty line.

It is a myth that life on IB, or other benefits, creates a 'work-shy' dependency culture. Research evidence by JRF shows that there are around 800,000 people with disabilities of working age, who want to return to the labour market. Evidence from the Scottish Executive's 'Social Focus on Deprived Areas (2005)' shows that there is a greater percentage of people of working age, who are economically inactive in the '15% most-deprived data zones' expressing a desire to return to the labour market than for Scotland as a whole. Incidents of IB claimants varies across Scotland and there are complex reasons for this. A 'one size fits all' policy would not address these. We see no need to adopt sanctions, such as cutting benefit levels for failure to attend 'work-focused' interviews'.

We believe that a 'support not sanction' approach should be adopted for people on IB who wish to return to work. Instead of adopting an approach that threatens people with sanctions and which could stigmatise some of the most vulnerable members of society, the Government should concentrate its efforts on encouraging employers to take a more positive approach to recruitment and retention of people with illnesses and disabilities. Recent research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development indicates that 60% of employers surveyed said they disregarded applications from people with drug or alcohol problems, criminal records, a history of mental health problems or incapacity. 55% said nothing would persuade them to recruit from these 'core-jobless' groups.

This is in stark contrast to the evidence on people wishing to return to work.

As a consortium, we will be working to address the negative aspects of the Green Paper and to raise these concerns with MPs and policy makers.