

## The Government's approach is far from fair

This editorial was written in the wake of a dramatic Conservative Party conference. On the one hand, Iain Duncan Smith announced the introduction of his universal credit, designed to simplify the system and reduce child poverty by increasing the financial rewards from work and the take-up of social security entitlements. On the other, George Osborne announced that child benefit would be removed from families in which one parent earns more than around £44,000 (while two-earner families on less than £88,000 keep it), and that there would be a weekly cap of £500 on benefits.

The anomalies inherent within the announcements highlight problems with the Government's approach. It is hard to see how they can be reconciled with David Cameron's belief that 'it's fair that those with broader shoulders should bear a greater load'. As CPAG pointed out recently, women and children do not have the broadest shoulders.

This issue of *Poverty* considers the impact of the cuts already announced. In it, Mike Brewer and others from the Institute for Fiscal Studies argue that far from being 'progressive', as the Chancellor claimed, the cuts outlined in the Budget will, over time, result in the poorest 10 per cent losing a higher percentage of their income than the richest 10 per cent, and that this will 'probably' increase child poverty.

Duncan Randall and his colleagues consider children's mental health problems. They ask why, when research identifies a close link between mental ill-health and poverty and the Marmot Review on health inequalities has called for a co-ordinated approach that addresses structural inequalities, healthcare workers in the UK are still encouraged to focus on individual interventions.

And finally, Nick Jones takes issue with the absolute belief that 'work is good for you' and that cuts to social security will reduce a damaging 'dependency' on the benefits system. He points out that, despite politicians' claims that this conviction is 'evidence-based,' the research is far from conclusive but suggests it all depends on the quality of the jobs.

These three articles raise serious questions about the coherence of the Government's approach to child poverty. Despite its claims that its approach is 'fair' and it intends to create the most 'family-friendly society in Europe', for most low-income families, the cumulative impact of the cuts will be hard to bear.

Increasing child poverty and family debt now to avoid (as David Cameron puts it) leaving 'our children... to pay our debts tomorrow' is far from fair and makes no economic sense. Meanwhile, attempts to inculcate anger towards the so-called 'undeserving poor', and arouse hostility between tax payers (many of whom rely on benefits) and benefit claimants (most of whom also pay tax) are unworthy of a government intent on creating a 'big society', in which, we are told, 'everyone feels that they belong.'

The Government has made a clear commitment to meeting the 2020 target on eradicating child poverty. Until it starts making more equitable decisions about how the deficit should be reduced, it is very hard to see how this will be achieved. ■

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*Poverty* is the policy journal of the Child Poverty Action Group. It aims to carry articles and features that will inform, stimulate and develop the debate on the nature and causes of poverty in its various forms and on the action required, especially by governments, to relieve and ultimately prevent it. Our objective is to publish material that achieves a high standard of analysis, without sacrificing clarity or accessibility, to specialist and non-specialist alike.

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