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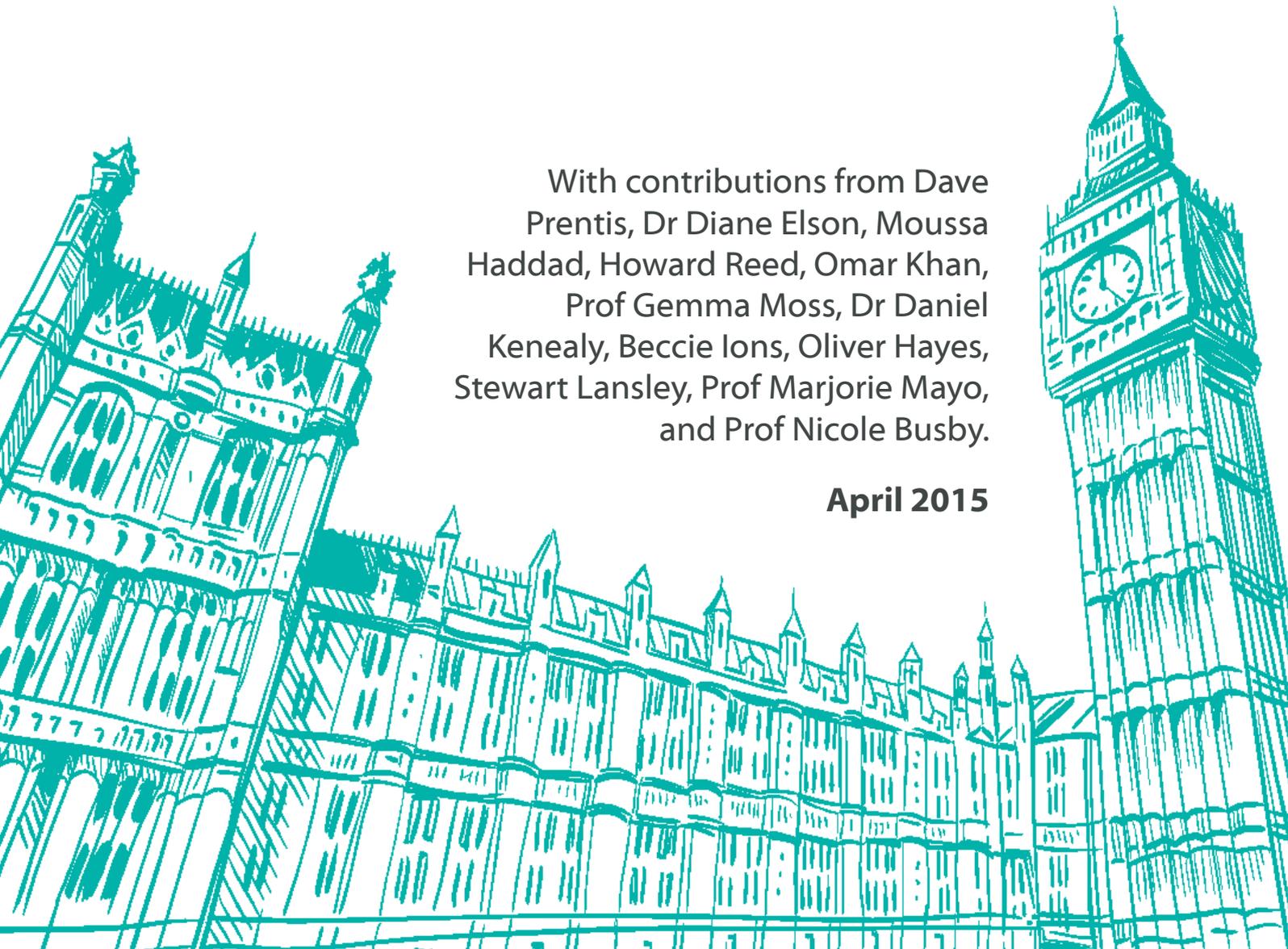
Centre for Labour  
and Social Studies

# The First 100 Days

What should a progressive  
government implement?

With contributions from Dave  
Prentis, Dr Diane Elson, Moussa  
Haddad, Howard Reed, Omar Khan,  
Prof Gemma Moss, Dr Daniel  
Kenealy, Beccie Ions, Oliver Hayes,  
Stewart Lansley, Prof Marjorie Mayo,  
and Prof Nicole Busby.

**April 2015**



# The First 100 Days



## What should a progressive government implement?

In May 2015 a new progressive government could take office. Following one of the most unpredictable elections in decades, it will be a huge task to set down clear priorities that can begin to restore fairness and challenge inequalities in wealth and power.

The first 100 days of the next government will determine not just the immediate changes that can be achieved, but the path of future progressive reforms.

This collection of essays from a selection of key thinkers brings together the priorities for achieving real progressive change across a range of policy areas.

With contributions from Dave Prentis, Dr Diane Elson, Moussa Haddad, Howard Reed, Dr Omar Khan, Prof Gemma Moss, Beccie Ions, Oliver Hayes, Dr Daniel Kenealy, Stewart Lansley, Prof Marjorie Mayo, and Prof Nicole Busby.

**April 2015**

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# Protecting Public Services



## Dave Prentis

**Dave Prentis is General Secretary of UNISON, the UK's largest public services union.**

The future direction of our public services is up for grabs on May 7th and despite the heat of the election campaign debate, there is a wealth of cold practical knowledge and experience available amongst public service workers about how to improve services. The solutions are in our hands and what is more there is now a natural learning environment as public services have diverged in their delivery between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, something all political parties, media organisations and think tanks frankly struggle with. There is an opportunity to build sustainable funding, introduce a new direction on procurement, increase accountability and involve the workforce, particularly in England in the first 100 days of a new progressive government, with an eye to influencing the triple 2016 devolved administration elections too.

A sustainable future for public services is vital. The major parties are committed to cutting the deficit created by the financial crisis over the next parliament, all at different speeds and with different methods. Post the Scottish Independence Referendum, political devolution has caught the imagination of politicians and the public but so far it has concentrated on devolved spending not independent revenue raising options. A further set of propositions advanced by a range of politicians and think tanks suggest that the route to

sustainable and affordable public services lies in placing a greater emphasis on preventative spending, collaboration between services such as health and social care and public interventions that are more oriented towards economic growth. Whilst many of these ideas might provide some savings in the longer-term, up-front investment will be urgently needed first. What is beyond doubt to most people working in the public services across the UK is that we have reached the ceiling on spending cuts and that public services need to be organised around the needs of those we serve and care for rather than arbitrary limits on public expenditure.

A new progressive government should take decisive action in the first 100 days and establish a new deal to repair the public finances and fund public services in the longer-term. This should include more progressive taxation, including raising income tax on high earners and a clampdown on avoidance and evasion. There is also an urgent need for a sustainable settlement for local authority finance, which must include setting sensible financial freedoms. Freedoms should include the ability to: borrow against secure income streams, such as housing and transport, which would not count against overall government borrowing as in the rest of the EU; set higher council tax, including new higher bands for higher value properties (in addition to a mansion tax); set business rates; levy small local taxes such as tourism tax; and levy fees and charges to allow full recovery of costs of services that they provide. Distribution of local government finance must be organised on the basis of local need and a commission should be established early on in the next administration to develop options for improving the way local government is financed for the longer-term. Local authorities should be the lead agency for joined-up public services along the Community Budgets and City Deals models in England and should be allowed to keep any savings released.

The evidence from the last 35 years of privatisation, outsourcing and marketisation is mixed at best, with numerous instances of service deterioration, profiteering and a race to

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the bottom on pay and terms and conditions of the workforce. As such, a new approach is needed that puts services and their users above the bottom line, takes out the profit motive, saves on transaction costs and ensures stability of provision. Keeping services in-house should be the default position for all public services.

A new progressive government should introduce regulations to make better use of the new EU Public Procurement Directive, with authorities able to choose in-house models of provision, with trade union recognition, national and local collective bargaining and social criteria applied to contracts. These are known as ‘fair wage’ clauses; they are common in Europe and American cities and cover much more than just the living wage. Before any services go out to contract, the next government should ensure there is a mandatory ‘public interest case’ made that sets out the reasons and business case as to why the contracting authority wishes to outsource the service. This should be a public consultation with a duty on the contracting authority to make the case that outsourcing is in the public interest. If the case is not answered then there should be no outsourcing; if the case is answered then in-house bids should be automatically included in the tender process. In addition, public contracting should include an extension of freedom of information to public contracts with private providers and a requirement for contractors to open up their books for scrutiny so that proper accountability can be restored.

The next government will need to renew their commitment to the public sector workforce if problems with recruitment and retention are to be addressed. Being able to guarantee safe staffing levels and ensure the very best service provision, relies on properly valued employees that work in partnership with employers and service users to shape provision around need. In recent times there have been continued attempts to make savings by pushing down pay, most vividly seen in the home care sector with zero-hours contracts and unpaid travel time sadly becoming the norm. A progressive government should deliver a new deal for the workforce within the first 100 days of

taking office. This new deal should include a renewed commitment to collective bargaining and equal pay, an end to the pay cap, recognition of the professionalism of support staff across the public services and effective data collection and monitoring to support the implementation of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The next government will need to do more to capitalise on the role of public services in securing an inclusive recovery that benefits everyone and not just a privileged few. Public services employ almost 5.4 million people across the UK<sup>1</sup>. In 2014/15 annual expenditure on public services amounted to more than £315 billion<sup>2</sup>. This spending provides a significant boost to the economy by investing in important services for the health and wellbeing of workers, their families and the wider community and prevents social problems. It also puts money into the pockets of workers so that they are able to spend and boost demand on local high streets across the UK. Despite attempts by the current Westminster government and their friends in the media to talk down public services and the broader public sector, it’s clear modern economies are interdependent. A strong private sector benefits from and depends on a vibrant and confident public sector acting in the public interest. It provides education, infrastructure and research, without which no private company could operate. The public sector ensures that we are healthy, cared for and able to live in a safe and clean environment.

Investing in our public services will be an important tool in rebalancing the economy away from low-paid and low-skilled work, towards decent jobs and a recovery that is fair and sustainable for the whole of the UK. The first 100 days of the next government will be critical for protecting and rebuilding our public services – it’s clear there is much that can, and should, be done to bolster the public service workforce and turn around the devastation wrought on public services by the Coalition government.

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# A Plan For the Economy



## Howard Reed

**Howard Reed is Director of Landman Economics, which specialises in policy analysis and complex econometric modelling.**

Britain faces an unprecedented multi-dimensional economic and social crisis – the bitter harvest of forty years of neoliberal policies compounded and exacerbated by five years of Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government. Accordingly, to be effective a new progressive government needs to take action from day one on several fronts at once. It will take decades to undo all of the damage of the post-1979 shift to the right, but much can be done in the first 100 days to begin that process. Six crises in particular need to be addressed.

First, the crisis in the social security system. Cuts to benefits and tax credits for working age families have pushed hundreds of thousands of families further into poverty. A new government should reverse all cuts to benefits and tax credits which have impacted families at or below median incomes. The introduction of Universal Credit should be halted until it is redesigned to be substantially more generous so that no low-income families lose out from moving to this system. The sanctions regimes for Jobseekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance, which are draconian, sadistic and ineffectual, should be abolished. The government should also commission new research on the introduction of a Citizens Income – a non-means-

tested benefit aiming to lift all families in the UK above the poverty line. A White Paper should be produced within 18 months, and an implementable scheme to replace most of the current social security system within 3 years.

Second, the crisis in the tax system. Successive increases in the tax-free personal allowance and cuts to corporation tax under the Coalition government have meant that the tax system no longer raises enough revenue to fund high-quality public services. To reverse these trends, personal tax should be redesigned, with the merger of the income tax and national insurance systems so that income from investments is taxed at the same rate as income from earnings. The system should feature gradually rising rates to ease the burden on low-to-middle earners and increase it for high earners. The top rate of the new combined income tax should be raised to 65 percent for earnings over £250,000 per year. A General Anti-Avoidance Rule should be introduced to minimise avoidance and evasion of taxes. Council Tax should be abolished and replaced with a progressive tax on property values with the government conducting a revaluation of properties in England within the first six months of its term. The government should also prepare a White Paper on the introduction of a land value tax to replace conventional property taxes. Finally, corporation tax should be redesigned with higher rates for less competitive sectors of the economy (to discourage profiteering) but increased allowances for research and development (R&D) and capital investment.

Thirdly, the crisis in our public services. The Coalition has deliberately underfunded many public services, especially those maintained by local government, in the hope of being able to exploit public dissatisfaction with poor service quality by blaming the public sector workforce and trade unions as a pretence for further outsourcing, privatisation and funding cuts. A new progressive government should undertake to reverse the post-2009 cuts to public services and to begin transferring services back in-house.

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The UK arms of outsourcing companies such as Serco and Capita should be taken into public ownership to facilitate this process. 30,000 extra staff should be recruited at HMRC to assist with the anti-avoidance crackdown. Quasi-privatisations such as the academies and free schools programme in education should be reversed, with schools reverting to local authority control. Utilities such as the rail network and electricity, gas and water should be taken back into public ownership. The government should announce its outright opposition to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) free trade agreement and should state that if sued by multinational corporations under the ISDS (Investor-State Dispute Settlement) provisions of TTIP, it will simply refuse to pay up, on the grounds that it is unethical to extract money from hard-pressed taxpayers to fill the pockets of corporate 'fat cats'.

Fourth, the housing crisis. Since the early 1980s the social housing sector has been in decline due to the Right-to-Buy local authority housing and failure to build enough housing association homes to compensate for the decline in local authority housing stocks. The result is a massive crisis of availability in the social housing sector, compounded by high rents and poor tenancy conditions for private tenants. The Government should fund a massive investment in social housing construction, aiming for a million new social housing units over the next five years. This should be combined with reforms to tenancy laws

to shift power from landlords to tenants, and rent controls in high-rent areas of the UK to restrict excess profiteering by landlords.

Fifth, the low wage crisis. Since 2008, average wages have declined by over 10 percent relative to consumer prices. To reverse this trend, the Government will need to end the public sector pay freeze which has been in effect since 2010, and instead commit to raising public sector wages by CPI+2 percent each year for the next five years. The government should offer corporate tax breaks for the re-establishment of collective bargaining and trade union recognition across the private sector. The Living Wage should be introduced on a statutory basis across the UK economy, effectively up-rating the current minimum wage by £1.35 an hour outside London, and £2.85 an hour in London.

Finally, the crisis of investment, which has been at historically low levels across the private and public sectors despite extremely low borrowing rates. The government should announce a new round of quantitative easing where, instead of the Bank of England buying private sector debt, it creates money to fund infrastructure projects including new green energy and public transport investments and a large-scale investment in social housing newbuild to ease the chronic housing crisis. A total infrastructure investment of around £50 billion per year for the next five years is what is required.

# Transforming Education



## Prof Gemma Moss

**Gemma Moss is Professor of Education at the University of Bristol and President Elect of the British Educational Research Association.**

Any progressive government committed to transforming education in the UK into a fairer and less fragmented system needs to start from first principles. Reading the party manifestos, it is striking how much divergence there now is in the way education operates in the different regions of the UK, and how far education in England has become an 'outlier'. England has gone much further in dismantling the link between the locality in which children live and the schools they attend. Children now travel greater distances to find a school, losing the connection to friends and neighbouring families in the places in which they grow up. This erodes the sense of local community.

Locally-based democratic control over education has been undermined by marginalising the role of local authorities. They no longer play a key part in determining who runs schools in their area, a power now exercised in Whitehall. Locally held powers to ensure that schools cooperate, rather than compete, over admissions, over exclusions, over "market share", over resources and over investment in teacher knowledge and school improvement, are all greatly diminished. Giving more power to individual heads or academy chains, as the Coalition government has chosen to do, has not ensured adequate planning for

school places, and does little to guarantee security of provision into the future. Academy chains and free schools have no equivalent duty of care to the communities where they are based. The processes by which Academy sponsors are appointed, their finances and governance structures, remain opaque.

The Ofsted assessment regime penalises rather than supports schools operating in the most challenging of circumstances, creating instability in staffing and leadership. All of this heightens a sense of insecurity in the education system as a whole. Parents are now expected to compete for school places increasingly distant from where they live. In a context where English local authorities are prevented from establishing new schools under their own control, parents cannot routinely expect to find a locally accountable school with high quality support. These flaws in the system have been exacerbated by the sharp rise in pupil numbers and the pressure this has placed on the provision of school places.

Education has become a gamble on an unpredictable future. Students choosing what and where to study as they move from school into university are expected to carry the financial risk of the individual decisions they make. In all of this the English system has moved very far away from thinking of education as a public good, as a means of building social cohesion at local level, and as a way of underwriting the contract between the state and the citizen, in which the state promises to act on the citizen's behalf. Look to Scotland for a clear articulation of another model, based on stable professional partnerships between local authorities, the teaching profession and the research community, working in the interests of the populations they serve and towards a common goal.

The problems in the English system are urgent. A progressive government will need to tackle them head on. Within the first 100 days of taking office, a key priority is to make all schools locally accountable to the communities they serve. This requires reconstituting local education authorities as the body responsible for

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educational planning in their area and to whom all schools, whatever their status, are accountable. Local authorities should resume the capacity to open new schools under their own control. Funding would need to fully recognise the different levels of disadvantage that particular communities face.

A progressive government will reinstate a proper separation of powers within the education system, so that an independent framework for reviewing curriculum, pedagogy and the examination system draws on stable partnerships between local authorities, the research community and the teaching profession. This will minimise the capacity of governments to change any such arrangements for short-term political gain.

Ofsted would be transformed into a hub for research-informed knowledge exchange that advises ministers on the key issues facing the education system and helps them decide where investment is most needed to meet new challenges. This would mean intelligence gathering and horizon scanning using far more substantial and sophisticated research tools than the current over-reliance on monitoring performance data year by year with a round of supplementary annual inspections.

A progressive government would invest in properly-funded, high-quality teacher education that harnesses the best evidence from research to inform practice, and values the contributions that university departments make to developing the profession alongside school-based expertise.

For too long there has been an excessively narrow focus on the economic function of education, important as that may be. Education should prepare children and young people to serve purposeful and rewarding lives, whatever their economic circumstances. The next

government must re-affirm that the education system is a collective investment in all of our futures and that the well-being of children and the communities that schools serve are core to their functioning and should take precedence over other concerns.

There are resources available to any government willing to make the necessary changes and wishing to act fast on these issues within their first 100 days. The British Educational Research Association has published an evidence-based policy manifesto for Fair and Equal Education that reports on the research evidence that can help create a fairer and more flourishing society<sup>1</sup>. Much could be gained by collaborating across the four regions of the UK to distil lessons learnt from the different approaches each has taken to investing in education and ensuring that more young people have ready access to a useful and enriching curriculum.

All of this requires the political will to step back from both micro-managing education at the centre; while also outsourcing key decisions about curriculum content and pedagogy, about who will manage schools, or about the form key assessment instruments will take, to an unaccountable few. A flourishing education system depends upon forging strong partnerships between educators, young people, their families and their communities; those who research education in its diverse forms; and those who organise and system-manage it, in pursuit of a shared vision of the common good. Their collective expertise should be deployed to make an honest appraisal of where the difficulties still lie, whilst strengthening the local resolve to make education work for all.

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# Tackling Inequality



## Stewart Lansley

**Stewart is a visiting fellow at the University of Bristol and the co-author with Joanna Mack of *Breadline Britain: The Rise of Mass Poverty*.**

Achieving a more equal society – by raising the floor and lowering the ceiling – should be a top priority for the next government. This requires a multiple strategy, some measures to be implemented in the first 100 days and some changes set in place to take shape over a longer time span.

The first action in raising the floor is to boost wages. The minimum wage – currently £6.50 per hour – should be increased in two stages to reach £8.00 by October 2016. Such a rise would lead to some modest loss of jobs, but would, with a lag, boost employment overall by raising demand in the economy. A progressive government should commit to the minimum wage being linked automatically to median earnings at a level determined by the independent Low Pay Commission (LPC). The current ratio of around 52% is low in comparison with other countries. Alongside this, the next government should set a date from which all new public sector contracts would only be issued to living wage employers, thereby boosting the numbers receiving this higher wage. Extending the remit of the LPC to advise on how to tackle Britain's endemic low pay problem, especially by finding ways of ensuring pay progression in lower paid sectors, would have a range of long-term benefits<sup>1</sup>. Not only

would these measures raise standards for individual workers, they would also contribute to raising the share of National Income going to wages, a ratio that has been in decline since the early 1980s and a key factor in rising inequality since then. Together these moves would encourage employers to seek ways of increasing productivity, a crucial requirement for boosting wages and growth in the long-term<sup>2</sup>.

While boosting wages at the lower end is important in tackling inequality, so too is improving the amount and quality of work. A progressive government should make full employment a cornerstone of macro-economic policy, setting a clear goal for reducing the level of involuntary unemployment, backed by the use of public employment programmes for the long-term unemployed. By improving labour's bargaining power, tighter labour markets would also help raise wages across the economy while simultaneously helping the public finances by boosting tax receipts and cutting the overall benefits bill. The growing problem of persistent poverty is increasingly the consequence of precarious and insecure work. New regulations are needed to tackle this growing insecurity and deteriorating conditions at work for many, for example, through much tighter restrictions on some employment practices including the growing use of zero-hour contracts.

In Britain inequality has been driven by the high concentration of privately owned capital – one of the highest concentrations of business ownership amongst rich nations – and the imbalance of power between boardrooms and employees, consumers and small businesses. These twin, embedded problems will be harder to turnaround but in the short-term measures must be put in place that tackle them further down the line. Three key measures would begin to spread the ownership of capital more widely, promote new forms of countervailing power and raise the rights of ordinary citizens over the multitude of corporate decisions that affect their lives and opportunities. Firstly, by encouraging alternative business models, from co-operatives and mutuals

to partnerships, the extent of private ownership in the economy would be reduced. Secondly, through establishing collectively-owned social wealth funds, some of the gains from the high returns on capital could be captured for wider social use<sup>3</sup>. For example, the proceeds of the sales of all public assets – from council house sales to publicly-owned companies – could be paid into a Public Investment Fund to be used to pay for socially useful investments including a significant boost to the supply of social housing. Such Funds would also raise the value of publicly-owned assets, which have declined sharply in recent times, and act as a counter to the level of the national debt. Thirdly, boosting the role of collective bargaining and reversing the long decline in trade union membership, especially amongst the low paid, would begin to challenge unequal power relations in the economy. A plan for improving the legal rights of employees over pay and conditions in the first 100 days is fundamental to challenging inequality.

While raising the floor is vital, a plan for tackling inequality must address how the ceiling can be lowered. Much tougher action against the persistent culture of entitlement and runaway executive and City pay – increasingly unlinked to corporate performance – is an essential element of a serious anti-inequality strategy. A number of measures would, over time, help cap top pay which has grown from 60 times that of the average UK worker in the late 1990s to over 160 times today. If workers were represented on company boards and the ‘remuneration committees’ that set executive pay, the role of labour as partners in running the economy would be recognised<sup>4</sup>. Ultimately taming executive excess depends on shifting business goals away from the dominance of chasing ‘shareholder value’. Pay packages tied to the short-term share price have greatly boosted executive rewards, but only by creating perverse incentives that have reduced investment, productivity and long-term profitability, thereby weakening the economy and wider society<sup>5</sup>. To promote investment and improve productivity, firms need to implement

pay structures that reward productivity increases and long-term performance.

Since the mid-1980s, Britain’s tax system has been regressive, biting more heavily on lower incomes than higher and thus widening the inequality gap. A new government should commit to a progressive system related to ability to pay and the fundamental principle of fair taxation. Measures should aim to shift the tax-take towards wealth, capital gains and higher incomes. Capital gains should be treated as income and taxed at the same rate, with an adjustment so that windfall gains are taxed more heavily than entrepreneurial success. This will prevent the super-rich disguising income as capital gains. Inheritance tax should be converted into a progressive lifetime capital receipts tax on beneficiaries<sup>6</sup>. Council tax should be reformed to make it proportional to property values through revaluation and the introduction of several new bands for higher valued properties<sup>7</sup>. The non-domiciliary rule should be abolished<sup>8</sup> and a minimum tax rate introduced on corporations while attempts should be made to secure much tougher, global steps to rein in tax avoidance.

Some of these policies can be implemented in the first 100 days. While most will take longer, the new government should signal its intention to act, moving beyond talk to embrace a much more proactive attack on inequality. Such a signal would itself help to build the more progressive social norms that would make it more difficult for a small financial elite to continue to use their corporate muscle to colonise an increasing share of the economic cake.

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# Restoring Access to Justice



## Prof Marjorie Mayo

**Marjorie Mayo is Emeritus Professor of Community Development at Goldsmiths, University of London.**

Access to justice is not only about ensuring people's rights, although this is vitally important, it is an issue of social justice, especially so for those with least power and resources of their own. Even more fundamentally, access to justice represents a basic principle underpinning democratic societies – that of protecting citizens against arbitrary government. From Magna Carta in 1215 onwards, no one should be 'financially unable to prosecute a just and reasonable claim or defend a legal right' as a matter of principle. This commitment to access to justice for all, regardless of the ability to pay, was further enshrined in the establishment of legal aid in 1949 as a pillar of the Welfare State.

In recent decades however, citizens' access to justice has been increasingly undermined, with particularly serious effects on the poorest and most disadvantaged sections of society. Under the Coalition government access to justice at work has been restricted through the introduction of tribunal fees and legal aid has become less and less available for the very people who need it most. Figures have shown that 70% of potentially successful cases at employment tribunals have not gone ahead because employees are deterred by costs<sup>1</sup>. At least 80% of those affected by the recent legislation to reduce the provision of legal aid (Legal Aid, Sentencing

and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, LASPO) have been from the most disadvantaged sections of society, including people with disabilities and women affected by domestic violence<sup>2</sup>.

A new progressive government needs to prioritise ways of protecting and improving access to justice for all, with particular emphasis upon improving access for disadvantaged communities. The focus of this essay is upon what a new government should set in motion in the first 100 days, whilst planning for the longer-term. Although resources can be expected to be constrained in the immediate future, in fact for every £1 spent on legal advice and aid the state saves around £6 on other forms of spending, such as costs arising from families becoming homeless and children being taken into care<sup>3</sup>. Whilst here the emphasis is upon improving access to justice in relation to welfare and family law, access to criminal legal aid and ensuring access to justice at work, such as ending tribunal fees, must also be prioritised.

The first priority in improving access to justice in welfare and family law must be to implement reforms that can be achieved immediately, under current legislation, using the Secretary of State's existing powers. These changes could be funded through the use of existing underspends in the immediate future, although they would pay for themselves in the longer-term by using public resources far more effectively.

The poorest and most disadvantaged sections of society have been particularly seriously affected by the implementation of LASPO, which drastically reduced the scope of access to legal aid – without making any long-term savings for the public purse. Housing benefit cases are a particular priority for reform<sup>4</sup>. There is no sense whatsoever in denying people access to legal aid, when sorting out their benefits problems could resolve issues at an early stage, rather than waiting until households face the risk of homelessness before they can obtain legal advice and aid. Such restrictions on access to justice were false economies. These restrictions should all be reversed and this process begun within the first 100 days.

Whilst it may take a little longer to once again extend eligibility for legal aid across all social welfare law and ensure that there are providers in place to offer support, there are issues of immediate concern that must be tackled in the first 100 days, even for those areas of law that are still eligible for legal aid. The particular priority here is domestic violence. Although cases involving domestic violence have remained eligible for legal aid, the surrounding regulations for demonstrating clients' eligibility are far too restrictive. These regulations need to be changed as a matter of urgency.

There are further urgent reforms that should be introduced by a new progressive government to ensure everyone is able to access justice. For example, children and young people up to the age of 18 should be eligible for legal aid right from the start. In addition, mandatory requirements to access justice via telephone gateways should be removed immediately where there are providers in place (e.g. debt), and arrangements for authorised providers across the other areas of law be put in place as soon as possible. Although these may work for some, they are totally inappropriate for others, such as clients with complex, interrelated welfare problems and those grappling with barriers such as language or mental health issues. Furthermore, the present system of 'Exceptional Funding' arrangements, which were intended to provide funding for compelling cases involving human rights not otherwise covered by legal aid, is also in need of urgent review. This system is not fit for purpose and is clearly failing to provide the safeguards that were promised to Parliament, meaning that many people are missing out on their opportunity for justice.

LASPO has had very damaging effects on the provision of legal aid and advice. Funding restrictions have impacted on Law Centres and Citizens Advice Bureaux – with nearly 200 Bureaux leaving the legal aid system since 2013. Private law firms have also moved away from welfare law provision. The Big Lottery Advice Transition Fund has enabled advice providers to survive in extremely challenging times. This fund should be

continued for an additional year, to keep services going, pending the development of longer-term funding mechanisms. The provision for criminal legal aid is already under huge strain, and the proposed two-tier system should be cancelled immediately – otherwise many, if not most, good firms will be forced out of business, leaving people vulnerable to miscarriages of justice.

These short-term measures for the first 100 days of a new government need to be backed up with the development of a national strategy for the longer-term. There are excellent examples of collaboration and planning, bringing different organisations and agencies together to provide services holistically and cost effectively within their particular areas. Similar approaches need to be developed more generally from the bottom up. There are currently 'advice deserts' – parts of Britain where people are unable to obtain advice and aid without travelling considerable distances. Good practices at the local level should be built upon as part of a national strategy to tackle these problems. This strategy would provide the overall framework for local strategies, which would be co-produced at local authority levels. The development of such a strategy would take somewhat longer – rather more than the first 100 days. But the mechanisms could be set in motion right away, with a clear remit to develop such a strategy, together with proposals for ensuring funding and for accountability and quality control, for the longer-term.

Access to justice for all, regardless of the ability to pay, has been a fundamental principle for any democratic society. An incoming government cannot be expected to provide instant solutions, reversing the setbacks of previous decades. But very significant progress could be made within the first 100 days, setting the framework for further progress towards ensuring access to justice for all.

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# Implementing An Equalities Agenda

**A government committed to reducing BME inequalities should ensure effective race equality policies form a core part of their plan for the first 100 days.**



## Omar Khan

**Omar Khan is Director of the Runnymede Trust and sits on the DWP's Ethnic Minority Advisory Group.**

No political party is an advocate of racial inequality - being called or thought of as a racist is now perhaps the worst insult in British political life. Unfortunately this focus on words and so-called 'political correctness' has deflected attention from structural racial inequalities in contemporary British society, and the ways in which these inequalities are transmitted generationally and institutionally. Being a Black and minority ethnic person in Britain today means that you have reduced chances of getting into university<sup>1</sup>, getting a job<sup>2</sup>, owning a home<sup>3</sup>, getting an inheritance, being promoted, and having high earnings<sup>4</sup>; conversely it increases your chances of being unfairly treated by the police<sup>5</sup> and of serving a longer sentence in prison for committing the same offence as a white person.

Typically, policymakers associate ethnicity with economic disadvantage. While it's unfortunately

true that all Black and minority ethnic groups are disproportionately likely to live in poverty<sup>6</sup>, one obvious problem with this sort of framing is the assumption that all racial inequalities are about poverty, and, conversely, that the issues affecting disadvantaged families don't vary by ethnicity. Such framing risks further stigmatising Black and minority ethnic families up and down the country, but it also fails to respond to the ways in which racism affects people on the street, in the labour market and in the media, regardless of their poverty.

In the past some politicians have claimed policies that disproportionately benefit the worse off are more likely to benefit Black and minority ethnic people. In principle this may be true – universal policies and institutions that don't consider ethnicity at all may disproportionately benefit BME people in so far as those same policies – such as universal healthcare – are of greater benefit to the non-wealthy than the wealthy. However, relying on universal policies alone will not be sufficient to tackle the ingrained ethnic inequalities we have in Britain today. A progressive government that is genuinely committed to reducing Black and minority ethnic poverty and inequalities should ensure effective race equality policies form a core part of their plan for the first 100 days of government.

The first policy priority of any progressive government should be to ensure data is collected on the effects of universal or anti-poverty policies in order to evaluate whether they actually reduce poverty and promote fair opportunities for Black and minority ethnic people. This sort of monitoring has reduced under the Coalition, but is incredibly important for holding politicians to account and assessing the effectiveness of policy decisions. For example, data has shown that while BME young people are 26% of applicants for apprenticeships, only 10% of those who secure an apprenticeship are non-white<sup>7</sup>. Research is also important for improving policies. For instance data indicates that in its current form, Labour's guaranteed job scheme may not equally benefit young BME people because they

are less likely to claim JSA, the benefit that this policy will use for guaranteeing such jobs.

Given the largest political parties' have committed to reduced public spending, a second and related point becomes necessary. When a government chooses to reduce expenditure in a particular area or scrap a particular policy, it must better evaluate the impact on racial inequalities. The Equality Act already places a duty on governments to identify measures to mitigate any increase in racial (and other) inequalities, a requirement seemingly lacking for policies such as the benefit cap (40% of those affected are BME), cuts to legal aid, the Immigration Act (including landlord checks), voter registration, and the Comprehensive Spending Review. A progressive government should ensure this is a binding requirement on all future policy changes.

There are currently significant inequalities in White British and BME outcomes, including: a 12% employment gap equalling 500,000 'missing' BME workers; higher unemployment rates, even for equally placed Russell Group graduates<sup>8</sup>; and higher required A-levels to get on the same course<sup>9</sup>. This leads to a third key policy priority: a government that is serious about tackling racial disadvantage cannot simply focus on policies of equal benefit to white and BME people. Rather, it must seek to address racial inequalities. A progressive government should not only demonstrate through monitoring that their policies do not increase ethnic inequalities, they should also ensure policies are designed to correct existing inequalities through improving outcomes for Black and minority ethnic people. Again, some of this could be achieved through more egalitarian policies generally, which are in principle more likely to benefit BME people. But as above, these outcomes need to be monitored, and policymakers need to be aware that different ethnic groups have different experiences of the labour market; in terms of benefit uptake, family size and other demographic features, to say nothing of any cultural or structural reasons why BME people do not currently engage with the state and its various services.

This last point suggests a fourth policy recommendation: that in formulating universal policies, even anti-poverty and egalitarian policies, governments need to carefully consider the material effects of implementing these policies. This may mean delivering a schools policy differently depending on the demographic features of a local authority or supporting BME- and women-led charities<sup>10</sup> in order to reflect the fact that some demographics are more likely to experience domestic violence, and other demographics may need specialised support that a universal service could overlook. This might be called 'targeted universalism'.

A fifth and final priority is to introduce more explicitly 'race-targeted' policies. For example, the next government should set a public service target that 20% of employees under-25 and 15% of employees under-40 are Black and minority ethnic. Government should work with the private sector to deliver a similar target by 2020. Such explicit race-based policies have typically been viewed as controversial; though Labour's Sadiq Khan suggested quotas in the judiciary<sup>11</sup> and in the last weeks of canvassing, David Cameron indicated the Conservatives would set targets for BME employment in the next Parliament<sup>12</sup>.

Such statements from Labour and the Conservatives reflect two realities: first, that existing inequalities in the labour market are not disappearing by themselves. It is now accepted that a generic social mobility or fair hiring policy does not result in equal opportunities for BME people. The Department of Work and Pension's own research<sup>13</sup> shows that even with the same qualifications, candidates who have an African or Asian-sounding surname need to send in twice as many CVs just to secure an interview. The second obvious reason is the make-up of the UK electorate: BME people are a rising share of the population and are therefore also a rising share of voters in a Britain of close elections and hung Parliaments<sup>14</sup>.

Whatever political shifts occur, the next government must do much more to address

Black and minority ethnic inequalities and not just focus on BME poverty. Runnymede is a member of a wider coalition of organisations that has identified 8 key asks<sup>15</sup> for the next government; emphasising employment, education, criminal justice, health, housing and immigration, and in each case we have focused on racial inequalities over poverty. Racial inequalities have significant effects on Black and minority ethnic people, young and old, in cities and in rural areas<sup>16</sup>. This is not only an enormous waste of human potential, and an increasing drag on Britain's economy, but a failure to offer equal chances to everyone. If the next government wants to increase economic activity and deliver a progressive, better democracy and economy, it must ensure that racial inequalities in 2020 are lower than in 2015.

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**A progressive government should set in motion a transformation that would embed equalities in everyday life for this and future generations.**



#### Dr Diane Elson

**Diane Elson is the Chair of the UK Women's Budget Group and Professor Emeritus of sociology at the University of Essex.**

The UK Equality Act (2010) protects people from discrimination on grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Public Sector Equality Duty (2011) requires all public bodies to have due regard to the need to prevent discrimination and advance equality. But since June 2010, the Coalition government has decided that cutting public spending is more important than these obligations, and has introduced cuts to social security and public services that deepen many of these inequalities. Single women (especially single mothers), people with disabilities, children in ethnic minority families, and pregnant migrant women have been particularly hard hit<sup>1</sup>.

A progressive government should immediately announce that it will take seriously the Public

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Sector Equality Duty and reverse those cuts that have done most to undermine the equalities agenda. However, to make sustainable progress in advancing equality requires not only action to make good the damage done, but also action to fundamentally reorient the UK economy; so that it is based on mutual care and support, and respect for dignity and rights. This must be done in ways that reduce inequalities, not only today, but also for future generations.

A progressive government must begin to reverse the damage done by cuts to spending on social security and public services within its first 100 days in power. In particular, the bedroom tax and the household level benefits cap should be immediately abolished. Plans for further cuts to local government budgets must be withdrawn and additional funding made available to local government so that they can re-vitalise Sure Start Children's Centres and reverse cuts to funding for care for frail elderly people and for services to combat violence against women and support survivors of that violence. Funding should immediately be restored for publically provided English language classes for migrants. Pregnant migrant women, including those who have been denied asylum and those who are undocumented, should have free access to maternity services guaranteed.

A progressive government should announce that Universal Credit will not be implemented in its current form. At the very least, it must be changed to ensure that women with employed partners gain from earning – as it stands the payments made will be reduced at a higher rate than under tax credits if they do start earning. The arrangements for payment should also be changed so that not all the money goes to one person in a household – something that may hinder women from leaving an abusive relationship. But a progressive government should look beyond remedying the worst aspects of Universal Credit and announce that it will seek to create a social security system that results in fairer sharing of caring and the costs of caring – both between women and men, and between

families and the wider community. It should provide an adequate independent income for all over the life course, so that people do not have to be dependent on other family members.

Inequalities in care needs and in the paid and unpaid work of caring are a major obstacle to the advancement of equality. To begin transforming the economy to support equality the government should announce that it is preparing a plan for major investment in social infrastructure – care, health, education and training services, social security and housing, complemented by investment in renewable energy and environmentally friendly public transport. This would improve wellbeing and productivity, both in the short run, but also in ways that persist over time, benefiting people not only today but in years to come.

To maximise the way this investment would reduce inequalities, it is essential that a progressive government should improve the terms and conditions of work for the paid work force who staff the social infrastructure (among whom women are the majority, including many ethnic minority and migrant women). This should cover both those directly employed in the public sector and the increasing numbers employed by subcontractors in the private sector. This could be done by strengthening worker's rights throughout the economy. The government should introduce measures to ensure that all workers, regardless of type of contract, should enjoy basic rights including collective bargaining rights. The minimum wage must be raised to a level that ensures a decent standard of living.

In addition to investment in social infrastructure, the government should improve support for people – currently mainly women – who provide unpaid care in families and communities. But to work towards a more equal division of unpaid care work, men should also be supported to contribute more to this work, for instance through well-funded care leave schemes and a reduction in full-time working hours.

The increase in public spending would in part pay for itself: by increasing employment and earnings, it would raise more revenue from income tax and national insurance and save money on social security. In addition, reversing some of the tax reductions introduced since June 2010 would save billions. The rise in the threshold for personal income tax costs around £12 billion a year from 2016/17<sup>2</sup> onwards and this benefits only those who pay tax. It does not benefit those with incomes below the tax threshold, 63% of whom are women<sup>3</sup>. Corporation tax cuts will cost around £7.9 billion a year from 2015/16<sup>4</sup>. The biggest contribution could come from taking effective action on tax debt, avoidance and evasion, estimated to be able to bring in almost £120 billion a year<sup>5</sup>.

Implementing an equalities agenda cannot be confined to token gestures, like getting more women on to boards of public companies. A progressive government would set in motion a transformation of the economy that would embed equalities in everyday life for this and future generations.

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The UK Women's Budget Group, together with the Scottish Women's Budget Group, have proposed PLAN F, a feminist economic plan to invest in creating an equitable, caring and sustainable economy. This essay draws on PLAN F to outline key measures that a progressive government should announce in its first 100 days. Further information is available at: [www.wbg.org.uk](http://www.wbg.org.uk) and <http://www.swbg.org.uk/>

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# Eradicating Poverty



## Moussa Haddad

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The next government will inherit a child poverty crisis. According to Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS) estimates, there are four million children living in poverty in 2014/15 after housing costs are taken into account<sup>1</sup>. This is an increase of 400,000 since 2010, and 300,000 more are projected to be tipped into poverty by 2020.

Even as all the main parties remain committed to ending child poverty by 2020, we are moving dramatically in the opposite direction. This amounts to a costly failure: CPAG estimates that child poverty costs the country at least £29 billion a year in services that deal with the effects of poverty, and, in the longer-term, in losses to the economy from wasted potential<sup>2</sup>. It is also a social and a moral failure, denying millions of children the childhoods they deserve. Focusing on child poverty requires us to address structural inequalities that produce poverty across society as a whole: it is an issue that affects and should concern us all. So what can a new government do about this widening social deficit?

The first thing to be said is that there is no silver bullet. Poverty is absolutely not inevitable – and looking at what has worked in other times and places is valuable – but nor is it something that can be eradicated overnight. For that reason, poverty must be tackled in three stages:

immediate actions to make poverty the priority it needs to be; practical steps that can move us in the right direction over the course of the next Parliament; and constructing a long-term plan for ending child poverty once and for all.

The incoming government cannot do everything in its first 100 days, but it can use that time to strike the right tone and to set out its priorities. Given the extent of the looming crisis, one of its first steps must be to commit to making child poverty a national priority in its programme for government. A new government should use its first Spending Review to mandate preventative spending today to avoid the enormous costs of child poverty tomorrow, changing the way government thinks about public spending so that it takes a long-term view of costs and benefits. It must signal an end to the Robin Hood in-reverse that has characterised austerity politics. Research from LSE, Manchester and York universities has shown that the poorest half of the population have lost income over this Parliament while those in the richest half have gained, all without any overall impact on deficit reduction<sup>3</sup>. More of the same is not socially sustainable.

One significant symptom of hardship is the rapidly rising use of food banks, with the Trussell Trust network alone giving emergency food to over 1 million people in 2014/15, more than a third of them children<sup>4</sup>. CPAG's experience in providing welfare rights advice in a food bank since 2013 – together with research looking into the experiences of more than a thousand food bank users across the country<sup>5</sup> – has given us a rich understanding of the drivers of the phenomenon. In the majority of cases, food bank use is driven by an acute financial crisis caused by the failures of the benefits system. Urgent reforms are needed at two levels: first, technical changes to existing benefit rules and regulations, as well as improvements in administration within the Department for Work and Pensions, must be made to ensure that delays and errors in the benefit system – which are causing significant hardship to families – are minimised. A progressive government must also commit to an

independent review of the benefits sanctions system, to ensure that sanctions are genuinely used as a last resort. Second, the next government must fix the system of emergency support – the safety net beneath the safety net of local welfare provision, short-term benefit advances, and hardship payments – that is designed to protect people when things do go wrong. This should include raising awareness of these provisions, simplifying their application procedures and ensuring that dedicated funding is in place to meet need.

Another immediate step the incoming government can make is to help protect families from rising living costs. Children's benefits have been chipped away at over the course of the last Parliament, with child benefit losing 14 per cent of its value during that time. A 'triple lock' for children's benefits, as for pensions, would ensure that they fall no further – and are gradually restored to their former value. Better work incentives under Universal Credit – particularly increased work allowances and new allowances for second earners – are a crucial aspect of making sure that Universal Credit's poverty-fighting potential is realised.

Perhaps the most important thing the new government must do is reinvigorate the fight against child poverty with a concrete and credible plan for its eradication. This is not the place to write that plan, but we know from past

experiences what works. During the 2000s, financial support for families with children, helping more parents into paid work and ensuring childcare provision, were key pillars of the success in reducing child poverty by over a million. To that we can add action on such structural issues as low pay, the housing crisis and education. Overcoming child poverty requires a truly cross-governmental approach, and a genuinely progressive government must be honest about the scale of the challenge – and use that as a driver in producing a plan for eradicating poverty that touches on all these areas, both tackling the long-term determinants of poverty and alleviating it in the here and now.

Whatever form the new government takes, it will contain parties and politicians who have loudly proclaimed their commitment to ending child poverty. Today, the economy is growing again and the fiscal deficit is falling – but a costly social crisis is looming. Now is the time for politicians to make good on those commitments, and give our children the childhoods they deserve. The hard work starts now.

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# Investing In A Future For Young People



## Beccie Ions

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It's no secret that young people feel alienated from politics, so as the election edges closer it is important to look at what policies young people might wish to see from the next parliament. In a recent report, British Futures estimated that out of 3.3 million eligible first-time voters, only 41% will definitely vote at the General Election<sup>1</sup>. This leaves 2 million young people who may not vote at all. There is a sense amongst people under the age of 30 that politicians do not understand their needs and it is not hard to understand why. Policies such as tripling tuition fees or ending the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) have had a damaging impact upon the economic prospects of many young people. Average incomes have stagnated over the last parliament, but housing and transport costs have continued to rise. As a result of this government's failure to take action many young people will never be able to catch up with the living standards and security their parents' generation now enjoy<sup>2</sup>.

In its first 100 days, a new progressive government should focus on improving the prospects for young people in Britain today. British Futures found that the main priority for young people was improving their employment opportunities. Those between the age of 18 and 24 are three times more likely to

be unemployed compared to the rest of the population<sup>3</sup>. Young people between 16 and 24 are also much more likely to be in insecure work and on zero-hours contracts than any other age group<sup>4</sup>. The next government must prioritise helping young people into genuine employment, not insecure and poorly-paid zero-hour contracts and part-time work that provides uncertainty. Young people need stability and secure work to be able to build their lives and become more optimistic about their futures – the next government should ban insecure zero-hour contracts.

A major contributing factor to systemic youth unemployment is the increasing employer-led demand for a higher-skilled workforce in terms of training and education. Over the past 20 years there has been a decline in entry-level positions that offer 'on-the-job' training<sup>5</sup>. Young people today are forever being told "you're not qualified", "you don't have the skills", or "you're not experienced enough" by potential employers. Helping young people gain the required entry-level skills essential for accessing employment should be prioritised by the next government, but pressure must also put on employers to provide more entry-level jobs with in-work training available rather than the current focus on unpaid internships. There should be a clear commitment from an incoming government to ending the exploitation of young people at work – ending unpaid internships is just the start. Training opportunities, apprenticeships and financial support should be provided to enable young people to gain the skills and experience required to provide better opportunities to be successful throughout life. If this issue is ignored by the next government the country is in danger of leaving a generation behind. The last government trebled tuition fees to £9000 per year and cut EMA, leaving many young people priced out of education. A progressive government would bring back vital educational support like EMA and commit to cutting tuition fees so that for young people from all backgrounds education is a viable option.

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The current economic situation for young people has not only made coping with the present difficult; it makes planning for the future impossible. Young people should be able to access affordable housing. With rents rising in many city centres and mortgage deposits becoming increasingly expensive, housing affordability is a major concern. 25 years ago a third of first-time buyers were aged under 25, now it's just 16%<sup>6</sup>. There were some attempts by the last government to help first-time buyers through schemes like Help to Buy, but very little was done to tackle the root cause of the housing crisis – the fact is that there are not enough genuinely affordable homes for young people to access. A lot more needs to be done by the next government – there needs to be an end to escalating rents and rising house prices which see so many young people priced out of areas including London. Bringing in rent controls and giving renters more rights, tackling the poor standards and extortionate fees in the private-rented sector and investing in building more social homes will be important actions that will have a huge impact on the lives of young people.

In the first 100 days of the next government young people need to see that politicians are serious about addressing these key issues. A

government which prioritises the needs of young people would significantly improve political engagement, as well as give the economy a much-needed boost. A skilled, well-paid workforce will not only allow the UK to compete internationally, it will grow the economy and allow us to invest in public services like health and education – to the benefit of everybody. On the other hand, failure to acknowledge the issues affecting young people will only exacerbate the current sense of disillusionment and anger at the political elite. Young people are the future; it is time for politicians to start improving our circumstances. Young people cannot simply be a footnote in manifestos anymore. If politicians do not want people to feel failed by the system, they must prove that politics can meaningfully improve our lives – and that begins with listening to our needs.

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# Defining A Green Agenda



## Oliver Hayes

**Oliver Hayes is a campaigner in the Political and Legal team at Friends of the Earth.**

As an environmental campaigner, I'm sometimes told by politicians that green issues are not doorstep issues, that constituents couldn't care less about the planet when they've got bills to pay, mouths to feed – and even the odd holiday to take. Any campaigner worth their salt will tell you it's a false dilemma. Protecting the environment and improving people's living standards are one and the same.

Take energy bills, probably the issue on which Ed Miliband's leadership is characterised more than any other. They've been rising exponentially for the last decade, far outstripping inflation. That's terrible news for people struggling to keep their families warm. It's also terrible news for the planet – the companies raking in the profits have a vested interest in keeping us hooked on dirty gas. Forget the 'green crap' charade, it's the wholesale cost of gas that is primarily responsible for this rise in energy bills. The policy solutions required from a progressive government are sometimes boring but often obvious. For example, insulating the nation's cold homes to a decent standard would also create jobs and boost local economies everywhere there are houses that need insulating. If these measures were carried out on a street by street basis the cost and inconvenience would be kept to a minimum. The poorest households should be prioritised, with those able to pay towards the cost insulated next.

A progressive government will need to stop hedging their bets on energy policy. This will mean closing the door on the fossil fuels of the past – 80% of which have to stay in the ground to avoid the worst climate change – and turbo boosting the renewables revolution by giving communities the power to own and generate their own electricity. It really is a revolution. In January wind out-performed nuclear and recent sunny weather saw solar produce enough electricity to meet the needs of 2 million homes – the equivalent energy for every house in Wales. The next Government must embrace and enhance this technology.

The next Government must demonstrate a sea change in thinking, prioritising protecting and restoring the environment for future generations. The devastating cuts in the 1980s led to, among other things, chronic underinvestment in parks and green spaces. For many people living in urban areas these provide the only opportunity to feel something other than concrete under their feet and to have the space – literally – to breathe clean air. Alongside this, there are also profound benefits for mental and physical human health to safeguarding the natural environment, which should never be overlooked. The countryside is in no less of a precarious position, with copious pesticide use wiping out the pollinators on which so much human food relies.

Another thing environmentalists are accused of is doom-mongering, an obsession with clouds and an aversion to silver linings. The hard truth is, things are not great – it's difficult to put a positive spin on, for instance, the news last year that half of the world's vertebrate wildlife (i.e. all animals, excluding insects) has disappeared in the last 40 years. Or, for example, that rather than meet air pollution targets to bring down dangerous levels of nitrogen dioxide in many of the UK's big cities, the current government has been fighting the targets in the courts<sup>1</sup>.

We need a government to set a vision for a valued and thriving environment and to

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acknowledge that if we are to achieve a fair, good life for all of us, there must be a recognition that we are part of that environment.

The first 100 days of a new government is not just a symbolic number. Containing a Queen's Speech and a likely Emergency Budget, it's the period where the new executive signals their priorities for office. The first Queen's Speech and Budget should put the UK on the path to defining a clear green agenda for government. This must include doing our fair share to avert runaway climate change; looking after nature; helping those suffering most from dangerous environments; and putting sustainable development at the heart of economic policy.

If a progressive government is serious about tackling climate change and protecting the environment, the first Queen's Speech should include a commitment to end fracking and a promise to phase out of fossil fuel extraction in the UK. There should be a legal commitment to making electricity almost entirely carbon-free by 2030 and a promise to shut down all old coal plants by 2023. In the first Budget, the Chancellor should announce an end to public money or tax relief for producing fossil fuels or nuclear power. In addition, a progressive government that allowed schools to have the power to borrow to invest in solar would signal a move towards cleaner, more sustainable energy creation. Within the first 100 days a new government should also launch a Treasury-led comprehensive review that could analyse the threats posed to the UK economy in an increasingly resource-constrained world.

A green agenda for government must prioritise ensuring that energy efficiency becomes a core part of national infrastructure policy. There

should be guaranteed funding to enable the insulation of 4 million homes up to efficiency standard C by 2020.

There will also need to be a clear actions to protect the natural world and meet international environmental obligations. There should be funding available for a package of measures to cut air pollution to World Health Organisation recommended limits, including a network of Low Emission Zones in every UK city. A key policy to protect wildlife, particularly the beleaguered bee, would be the re-introduction of the National Pollinator Strategy and an extension of the ban on neonicotinoid pesticides. Furthermore, a progressive UK Government must oppose the EU-US Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the murky detail of which would further shackle Britain to a fossil fuel intensive energy system and put downward pressure on existing environmental regulation.

The ability of environmental campaigners to speak truth to power on these issues and many more has been attacked by the Coalition government's pernicious Lobbying Act. A progressive government must repeal the Act upon taking office, and ensure this comes into effect before the 2016 devolved administration elections so that true democratic discussions can take place about the impact of policy decisions.

There's much more to be done to define a real and effective green agenda for government. We will watch the first 100 days with interest to see exactly how progressive the next government intends to be.

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# Restoring Power to Working People



## Prof Nicole Busby

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In order to fully restore the power of working people, a future progressive government would need to reconstruct the social contract which has been incrementally dismantled by successive governments over the past 40 years. The incoming government would need to set down clear priorities within the first 100 days of taking office which could rebalance power relations between working people and their employers. The shift in power away from workers in favour of business cannot be solely attributed to the Coalition government, but the position of labour has undoubtedly been weakened by its unbending commitment to austerity.

To reverse the completely avoidable hardship imposed on millions of working people over the past five years, a progressive government would have to start by reframing the political context in which labour relations are currently situated. Much of the rhetoric on which the austerity agenda depends is grounded in a politics of separation which unhelpfully pits employers against workers and workers against each other. Those characterised as ‘hard working taxpayers’ are portrayed, alongside employers, as the good guys, the ‘strivers’. Those who assert their employment rights having lost their jobs or those claiming their entitlements to social security are

the baddies, the ‘skivers’. Of course it doesn’t take much to cross the dividing line from good worker to bad – a few short steps taken as a result of events outside of an individual’s control. The demonisation of those who find themselves in dire straits is endemic within a system in which increasing numbers have little or no control over their own working lives and who find their right to reply is rapidly being swept away.

Alongside the ‘skivers’ are those workers who come together to collectively challenge threats to job security and working conditions, the ‘troublemakers’. The first priority of a progressive government would be to acknowledge the collective strength of trade unions as a critical force for good aimed at redressing the long-recognised power imbalance in labour relations. The current restrictions on unions’ activities should be removed as a means of strengthening their members’ ability to take action. Collective bargaining would be accorded the respect and status it deserves as the most important democratic means by which workers’ voices can be heard. By strengthening unions’ capacity to work with, not against, employers through a process of social partnership, the government could restore workers’ power as a countervailing force to balance the otherwise unending march of capital which benefits only the very rich.

Recognition and facilitation of the power of organised labour by a progressive government is, however, not the only necessary response to the current situation. Globalisation and the slicing up of the labour market mean that the networks that determine labour relations and regulation have both expanded and contracted. Increased competition has been used as a rationale for suppressing wages, yet divided working arrangements alongside an increase in local bargaining and individual negotiation have prevented national and international networks’ from mounting an effective response. The individualisation and effective privatisation of the employment relationship marks the most prominent and pernicious shift in labour market regulation over the last 40 years. While

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enhancing collective rights will help to reverse this trend in some sectors, those sectors where the problems caused and reinforced by isolated working practices are most acute will remain out of reach unless a progressive government takes decisive action.

Care workers and others on zero-hours contracts with little job security often provide crucial services to the most vulnerable members of our society. As its second priority, a progressive government should extend individual employment rights by providing and protecting a living – not a minimum – wage for all workers and by banning the use of restrictive contracts which bind workers to employers without guaranteed income or employment protection. The conditions by which a growing class of working poor has emerged in one of the world's richest economies must be addressed by a full and urgent investigation into the use of 'in-work' benefits which subject workers and their families to subsistence incomes whilst subsidising the profits of rich multinational companies.

The deficit, seen as the priority by all of the main Westminster parties in the lead up to the election, has been used to justify the removal of access to justice for many workers. The Coalition government increased the threshold for unfair dismissal claims from one year to two, and introduced fees of up to £1200 for those seeking to assert their rights at an Employment Tribunal. These actions have disempowered workers and placed even more power in the hands of

employers. Under the new scheme, recourse to the law for what are often blatant abuses of employers' power is determined by an individual's ability to pay. Bad employment practices simply go unpunished. The third priority of a progressive government would be to resurrect workers' access to justice by removing the unfair dismissal threshold completely, abolishing fees for employment tribunal claims and providing publicly-funded legal advice and representation for those – on both sides of an employment dispute – who are unable to pay for it.

There are other important actions that a progressive government would take beyond its first 100 days to complete the restoration of power to working people. This would include full implementation and enforcement of the Equality Act and increased state-provision of good quality, affordable childcare alongside enhanced rights for working carers based on need rather than on outdated and gendered notions of 'the family' and associated social arrangements. However, in order to put a suitable framework in place within which its prioritised actions will engender real and sustainable change, the government's fourth priority should be a renewed commitment to human rights. It is only through recognition of our international obligations and realisation of the important values enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights that fundamental social and economic rights will be upheld and extended in the longer term – improving the lives of all working people in this country and beyond.

# Reforming Politics And Representation



## Dr Daniel Kenealy

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The UK's first-past-the-post electoral system was designed to produce strong single party government. It failed to do so in 2010 and it seems it will fail again in 2015. In the coming election the UK's two main parties – Labour and the Conservatives – may once more struggle to secure two-thirds of the popular vote between them. A regional party, the Scottish National Party (SNP), could end up holding as many as 50 seats in the House of Commons after receiving around 4% of all votes cast. The SNP would potentially have more seats than the Liberal Democrats, UKIP and the Greens combined even though those three parties between them may capture up to 25% of the total popular vote. The reality is that the UK's electoral system is a poor transmission mechanism for the values, preferences, and ideas of its people. This needs to change.

Real political and representative reform will take a long time to enact, but there is much that can be done in the first 100 days of any 'progressive' government to start this important process. Labour has already committed to a serious rethink on how the UK is governed, with their manifesto pledging to establish a "people-led Constitutional Convention" to directly address devolution and to drive political reform<sup>1</sup>. This represents a commitment to a specific *process* of delivering political and representative reform – but what

shape might a people-led Constitutional Convention take and what should the substance of those reforms look like?

In terms of *substance*, Labour want to replace the House of Lords with an elected Senate of the Nations and Regions, devolve more powers to Scotland and Wales and grant the vote to 16 and 17 year olds. Admirable aims certainly. All ought to form part of any package of reforms. But, by convening a people-led Convention a progressive leadership would have to accept that other ideas might be brought forward. These could include the significant reform of the electoral system to make it truly proportional and reflective of the balance of views amongst citizens; a review of constituency boundaries to make them larger and more equal; and a second look at the decision to introduce Individual Electoral Registration, which preliminary research has suggested may reduce voter registration<sup>2</sup>. Progressive change should be focused on dispersing power, breaking the monopoly of the two 'main' parties at Westminster, and breaking the monopoly of Westminster and Whitehall in the overall governance of the UK.

British people certainly have the appetite for constitutional change. I, and colleagues at Edinburgh University, recently conducted a survey of nearly 8,000 respondents across the UK about how the nation is governed, which produced several encouraging findings<sup>3</sup>. Between 44% and 50% of those with an opinion felt that too little time is spent discussing how the UK is governed. Even more remarkably, more than 60% of respondents with a view on the matter either agree or strongly agree that the UK should launch a Convention<sup>4</sup>. However, this enthusiasm must be balanced<sup>5</sup> against a widespread lack of faith that ordinary people can *actually* influence how the UK is governed. That sense of resignation needs to be combatted in an authentic way and the first 100 days of a progressive government should be spent communicating the message that 'this time it's different'.

If politicians really are seeking a people-led process, they should not, in fact, do too much reforming within the first 100 days. A progressive

government should instead send a clear message that a people-led process will be convened and that expert advice about how best to organise that transparently and inclusively will be sought. Rather than trying to capitalise on any ‘honeymoon’ period and progress reform quickly, the new government should pause and think carefully about the process itself. The first 100 days should be about both learning and cultivating an atmosphere of trust between politicians and the wider citizenry.

There are a number of examples of people-led conventions elsewhere in Europe and a progressive government in Britain could learn some important lessons from the successes and failures of these approaches. For instance, in Iceland<sup>6</sup> the 2009 financial crisis triggered a serious rethink of their constitution. A significant positive about this process was the creation of a National Assembly of 950 citizens, drawn randomly from the electoral register, who came together to discuss their views about what should be in the new constitution. This was followed by a national election for 25 representatives to form a Constitutional Assembly, tasked with drafting a new constitution and a draft constitutional bill<sup>7</sup>. The whole process was highly transparent, with weekly drafts of the bill posted on an interactive website enabling the public to view developments and reply to them directly. Hundreds of citizens participated in redesigning their political system. The bill was then put to the public in a referendum. Despite the best efforts of the Icelandic people, the fate of Iceland’s reform effort remains uncertain as for several years the passage of the bill has been thwarted by the Icelandic parliament<sup>8</sup>. In Iceland, it was when the politicians stepped back into the process that the wheels started to come off and this is a clear lesson for any British attempt at people-led reform.

In Ireland<sup>9</sup> a new effort in participative democracy took place between 2012 and 2014, with 66 randomly selected citizens working alongside 33 parliamentarians to develop proposals to amend the constitution. Combining politicians with citizens proved an effective way of securing

greater political buy-in to the reform process. However, similar to the situation in Iceland, the government were dismissive of many of the suggestions and what will ultimately appear on ballot papers in May 2015 is a very tepid<sup>10</sup> version of what the Convention originally proposed.

The examples above reveal the need for political leaders who are serious about people-led change to commit to it firmly, and convince others to do the same. It cannot be just another issue on the government agenda. Senior politicians need to exhibit leadership and commit to the process, making the case for it whatever it ultimately produces. When the people do speak – their voices need to be heard, respected, and acted upon.

There are precedents for organising genuinely people-led Constitutional Conventions. But, in the first 100 days, the emphasis should be less on rapid action and more on purposeful reflection, learning, and planning. Any progressive government wishing to deliver such a Convention must build confidence in the process and secure the necessary political backing. The biggest obstacle is unlikely to be public unwillingness to get involved. It is, as the examples of Iceland and Ireland make clear, more likely to be politicians either blocking or watering down proposals. It is that culture shift amongst the establishment, that willingness to let go, that is so necessary but so rare.

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