



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## WELFARE REFORM COMMITTEE

Esther McVey MP, Minister for  
Employment

By email

TG.01  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP  
Direct Tel: 0131 348 5182  
Fax: 0131 348 5184  
[WelfareReformCommittee@scottish.parliament.uk](mailto:WelfareReformCommittee@scottish.parliament.uk)

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Dear Minister for Employment

Thank you for your letter dated 11 November 2014 regarding sanctions and conditionality.

Just in the last few days we have seen more evidence being presented by Oxfam, Child Poverty Action Group, the Church of England and the Trussell Trust on the issue. As I'm sure you are aware their latest report has found that, for between half and two-thirds of the people included in the research, the immediate income crisis leading to foodbank use was linked to the operation of the benefits system.

Problems included waiting for benefit payments, sanctions, or reduction in disability benefits or tax credit payments. Many participants were also not aware of the various emergency payments available in different circumstances, and even fewer were receiving them. The latest Trussell Trust statistics confirm that 28% of food bank clients in Scotland were referred due to benefit delays and 18% due to benefit changes. These findings very much reflect those of our own reports on sanctions and foodbanks.

From this perspective there clearly remains a significant issue concerning the way the sanctions regime is operating, and there are a number of points raised in your letter which the Committee would contest. In light of this the Committee wishes to reissue its invitation to you to appear formally before it to enable us to have a full discussion of these concerns on the record. The message coming from the UK Government is that it wishes to have a strong relationship with Scotland. We believe that accepting our invitation would be a positive example of demonstrating that strong relationship in practice.

Yours sincerely,

**MICHAEL MCMAHON MSP, CONVENER**