

"I hate being on benefits. I feel like I have no pride in myself any more." (Unemployed 20 year old)

**citizens
advice
scotland**

Young people and benefits



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Citizens Advice Scotland's latest report, *Being Young; Being Heard*, outlines the impact of the recession on young people in Scotland in their own words. Key findings include:

- As the economy continues to struggle after the recession, an increasing number of young people require support from the welfare system
- The number of young people claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) in Scotland increased by 79% in the three years up to August 2010¹
- Young people are entitled to lower payments and less support in the welfare system, including lower JSA and Housing Benefit payments. This disparity in support causes financial hardship for many young people.

Entitlement

Young people are entitled to lower payments and less support than older adults, whilst their entitlement is often complex and difficult to understand. Young people under the age of 25 are entitled to 20% lower Jobseeker Allowance (JSA) payments, in addition to lower Housing Benefit payments due to the Single Room Rent (SRR) policy. They are not entitled to working tax credits based on their age

These policies appear to be based on the belief that young people are more likely to live with, and be supported by, their parents. However, many young people do not have this avenue of support and are therefore undersupported and discriminated against by the welfare state due to their age. This situation often leads young people into debt and housing arrears.

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Number of young people claiming benefits

There has been a significant increase in the number of young people in Scotland claiming benefits due to the recession.

- The number of young people under the age of 25 that are claiming any type of benefit increased from 65,530 in August 2007 to 81,960 in May 2010 – an increase of 25%²
- The number of young people claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) in Scotland increased by 79% in the three years up to August 2010³
- Around 13% of young people in Scotland claim at least one benefit, rising to a fifth of young people in some local authorities⁴.

The experience of claiming benefits

The evidence from this research suggests that young people are unhappy claiming benefits and are desperate to find employment. Far from being reliant on benefits, it is very likely that young people are underclaiming the benefits that they are entitled to. Research undertaken during the height of the recession showed that many young people feel shame in claiming JSA or Income Support. More than two in five young people would be ashamed to make an application for these benefits.

Problems claiming benefits

In the backdrop of the recent recession, issues such as entitlement, payment problems and administration issues have increased for young people. This has caused financial hardship and stress for vulnerable young people and families.

Young people are often first time claimants who lack awareness of entitlement and how to interact with the benefits system. In some cases, this lack of awareness can lead to sanctions for failing to comply with job search conditions.

Bureaux have reported that young people can receive poor or conflicting advice from Jobcentres or benefit agencies which can cause hardship for claimants.

CAS recommends that:

- The UK Government end age discrimination in the benefits system, ensuring that young people have parity in entitlement and support
- The new Work Programme targets support at young people who face significant barriers to entering the jobmarket.
- Information and advice provided by Jobcentres and benefit agencies should be appropriate for young people to ensure that they do not suffer detriment due to lack of knowledge or poor advice.

An East of Scotland CAB reports of a 17 year old client who is seven months pregnant and was wrongly advised by JobCentre Plus. The client came to the bureau with her 17 year old partner. The conflicting advice they received from different officers delayed the claims process. They have had no income for four weeks.

A West of Scotland CAB reports of an unemployed 19 year old client who received a significant JSA sanction for failing to apply for a job. Having gone to the jobcentre to report that he had mislaid an application form, he was told that his JSA had been stopped for 13 weeks for failing to comply. This is the first occasion in which the client has failed to comply. The client has appealed against the decision and made an application to the Hardship Fund, but currently has no income with which to support himself.

¹ NOMIS - Office of National Statistics

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid