

Report for the SPA

It's the fifth annual [Challenge Poverty](#) Week and the biggest yet, with around [150 events](#) going on across Scotland as well as online and through various social media. On Monday (16th October) we hosted and took part in an event in conjunction with the [Poverty Alliance](#), the [Social Policy Association](#) and [What Works Scotland](#) that aimed to bring together academics, policy makers, practitioners and a range of others interested in understanding and challenging poverty. This short blog will try to bring together some of the main themes from the day.

The main theme from the day was undoubtedly that more needs to be done to challenge some of the myths and attitudes that continue to shape the discourse around poverty in the UK. These include, for example;

- ...*real* poverty does not exist in the UK
- ...poverty is the fault of the individual
- ...those in poverty just need to work a bit harder
- ...nothing can be done about poverty, it will always exist, and;
- ...if only social security was tightened those in poverty would 'try harder'

For anyone working in the area of poverty you probably don't need to be told about these, or how frustrated you are that these continue to hold sway over popular understandings of the issue here in the UK. Abigail Scott Paul from the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) (JRF) gave a presentation on some of the work they are currently doing, creating a strategic communication alongside the [Frameworks Institute](#), to try and interrupt these popular misunderstandings. As many others noted, it seems that providing facts and figures are not enough – and Abigail made the point it is critical that those trying to combat some of the popular misunderstandings around poverty pay attention to how their messages are framed and that narratives make sense. The JRF hope to publish some tools next year – so we'll sit tight until then and look forward to the outcome of this work.

Much discussion centred on understanding the wider implications of poverty – that it is about more than a lack of financial resources (although this is crucially important). Hazel Ratcliffe, an activist with the Poverty Alliance, gave a frank and honest talk on her own experiences of poverty – and talked about how a lack of resources limited her ability to participate in community life. As a Mum this also affected the ability of her boys to take part in activities with the school and with friends. Carla McCormack, Policy Officer from the Poverty Alliance touched upon this wider understanding of poverty when she drew attention to the wider 'Poverty Mix' – that it is about:

- Income
- Services (access to, as well as the service people get from them)
- Participation in Society
- Attitudes

Carla also discussed the difficulty we have all had in shifting attitudes around poverty and that that is what makes events such as Challenge Poverty Week important, where we can focus attention on the issues. The Poverty Alliance are running with three key messages that they hope people will 'take home' from the week:

- Poverty exists in Scotland and affects us all
- Poverty can be solved by boosting incomes and reducing costs
- Tackling poverty is about ensuring we are all able to participate in society

Hazel and Carla both discussed some of the barriers people have in their own lives when trying to escape poverty – things such as childcare, travel expenses, a lack of flexibility in work patterns and mental health issues amongst many other things. But expressed frustration that these issues tend to be overlooked or forgotten about when poverty is discussed – and the blame is attached to individuals, rather than the structural barriers they can face in everyday life.

The final theme that came across from the day was the issue of poverty stigma. This came across in all the discussions and was particularly strong in the academic presentations from Ruth Patrick ([Dole Animators](#)), Kayleigh Garthwaite ([Foodbank Use](#)) and Alan Mackie ([Young People](#)). It was clear in all these presentations that the stigmatisation of those in poverty and those who access social security is having a profound effect on people's sense of self. Not only is this affecting their health (mental and physical) but is also impacting on their ability to participate in the norms of social life, things that we all take for granted, perhaps. That is why campaigns such as the Poverty Alliance's [Stick Yer Labels](#) are so invaluable – and why more needs to be done to tackle the negative impact of attitudes to those in poverty. And this needs to start with those in positions of power who can be the worst offenders in labelling those in poverty as somehow deficient and ignore the profound structural barriers that create poverty in the first place. It was suggested, however, that many politicians in Scotland are generally working to counter these narratives so it will be interesting to see how this progresses over the next year.

Last but not least we had [Hayley Bennett](#) from the University of Edinburgh and What Works Scotland who discussed some of her research looking at how services are delivered to those accessing public services. Two key messages from Hayley's presentation were, firstly, that it is crucial that more is done to encourage services to talk to one another in order that they can be more responsive to people accessing their service. The second key message was that space should be given to those who deliver services in order that they can have a better understanding of the complexity of poverty - and importantly that they don't contribute to and exacerbate people's feelings of stigmatisation and shame. After all, they are supposed to be there to offer service as well as support, so it is crucial that they understand where those in poverty are coming from. This was something that Ruth and Kayleigh's presentations had touched upon earlier, too - that more is required to 'shame proof' social security delivery and to change cultures in employment support provision.

The post presentation discussion saw responses from Scottish Government officials and a discussion about how we can all have an impact in future policy discussions on poverty. Civil servants emphasised that they are trying to get out and meet with those who policy affects on a day-to-day basis, and ensure the views of those with experience of poverty are incorporated in the policy making process. For example through the [Fairer Scotland Conversation](#) and mutual mentoring with the [Poverty Truth Commission](#). In terms of tackling stigma in relation to service delivery, dignity and respect are key principles shaping thinking, for example in developing the [Scottish social security system](#) and [tackling food poverty](#). Officials highlighted that this is a good time to shape policy, for example thinking around social security delivery and the Child Poverty delivery plan. [Consultations](#) were mentioned as a key way that we can have an impact on policy discussion (particularly in shaping legislation) and that everyone should feel they can contribute. They also emphasised the point that we need to perhaps 'box a bit more clever' in how we get evidence into policy, being more specific about how we, and our work and insights, can make a difference. In general, keeping it brief, highlighting the key messages, thinking about how your research fits with a wider body of evidence and drawing out policy implications all help. Insight on 'what works' is especially helpful, for example: what are the key things we should be doing in order to change attitudes towards those in poverty?

Moving forward there was agreement that discussion and engagement with policy-makers will continue. And that it is crucial that those with lived experience of poverty are involved in these discussions – particularly those that focus upon attitudes to poverty. A good place to begin may be the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's conference in January in Scotland next year – so keep an eye out for further information (venue, date etc.) on that on [their website here](#).



Figure 1 - Alan Mackie



Figure 2 - Kayleigh Garthwaite



Figure 3 - Discussion Time

Attendance

The event was very well attended and representation came from across sectors and organisations with a range of interests and perspectives. This made for an extremely profitable discussion after the presentations and contributed to the dialogue highlighted in the previous section.

Attendees

Douglas	Hamilton	Poverty and Inequality Commission
Chloe	Riddell	Children 1st
John	Watson	ASH Scotland
Kiren	Zubairi	Voluntary Health Scotland
Kayleigh	Garthwaite	University of Birmingham
Ruth	Patrick	University Of Liverpool
Hayley	Bennett	University of Edinburgh
Abigail	Scott Paul	JRF
Alan	Mackie	University of Edinburgh
Eve	Livingston	Event Chair
John	Mckendrick	Academic
Adrian	Sinfield	Academic
Jay	Wigan	Academic
Morag	Treanor	Academic
Karen	Armstrong	Scottish Government
Leila	Akhoundova	Scottish Government
Alison	Stout	Scottish Government
Catriona	Rooke	Scottish Government
Nick	Wilding	Scottish Government
Justine	Geyer	Scottish Government
Nick	Hay	NHS Health Scotland
Hazel	Ratcliffe	Student/Carer
Vanesa	Fuertes	Academic
Carla	McCormack	Poverty Alliance
Lynn	Railston	NHS Health Scotland
Ashleigh	Oates	NHS Health Scotland
Fiona	McHardy	Poverty Alliance
Jenny	Duncan	CPAG Scotland