

Gender Institute and Department of Sociology discussion

# Budgeting for Gender Equality: is government economic policy fair to women?

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*Chair, LSE*

**LSE** events

Suggested hashtag for Twitter users: #lsegenderequality



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# Foundations for Gender Equality

- Equal opportunities for **quality paid employment**
- Access to adequate **independent income** for all women and men
- Coalition's measures in June 2010 Budget and October 2010 Spending Review chip away at these (see: [wbg.org.uk](http://wbg.org.uk))
- Measures and proposals announced so far in 2011 appear to mark a trend towards economic dependence for women and the return of the Male Breadwinner Model.
- But there is also potentially some better news.

# Welfare Reform Bill (February)

- Sets out proposals for **Universal Credit**: means-tested, single monthly payment to household intended to increase incentives to get one adult into work and to 'mimic wages'.
- Strengthens work incentive for one working adult; but benefit withdrawal rate will be faster for second earners.
- Maximum subsidy for childcare costs down from 80 to 70%.
- Single household payment. Couples can nominate who the payment should go to; it will only be split in emergencies.
- Women manage budgets and day to day spending; a single monthly payment makes it harder to budget on low incomes.

# The Budget (March)

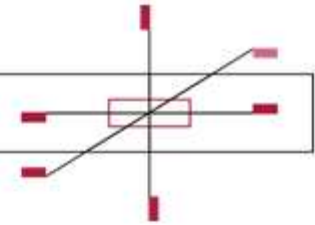
- Commitments to tax breaks, promoting enterprise and improving skills. But nothing for women's employment.
- Proposed rise of personal allowance to £8,105 in 2012/13 will lift 260,000 people out of tax, 56% of whom are women.
- But will not benefit those earning below this threshold, 73% of whom are women (LFS 2009-10).
- Desired job growth in the private sector will not necessary benefit women: gender pay gap; less compatible with caring responsibilities; attack on regulations.
- Investment in 50,000 new apprenticeships but no commitment to gender equality in allocation or quality. Budget's emphasis strongly on science.

# Pension Green Paper (April)

- ‘A State Pension for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ (2011 DWP) sets out plans for reforming current pensions system.
- One option is for single-tier state pension, combining BSP and S2P. Set at ‘around £140’ per week; gets rid of means-tested Pensions Credit.
- Explicit aim to reduce gender inequalities in pensions (DWP 2011, 22).
- But: future pensioners only; still based on contributory principle (rather than citizenship); does not compensate for loss of public services.

# So Far in 2011...

- No support for women in the shift from public to private employment opportunities.
- An explicit acceptance that the Male Breadwinner Model is 'justified' (DWP 2011, 19).
- Nothing to help people on the lowest incomes, many of whom are women.
- Nothing to compensate lone parents and single pensioners for the loss of services due to October's public sector spending cuts.



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