

Multi Criteria Analysis – More information on the process used to develop options for future changes to Scottish Carer’s Assistance eligibility

An approach called a Multi Criteria Analysis was used to help to prioritise the changes which could be made through Scottish Carer’s Assistance. This process was chosen as research with carers and support organisations came up with a number of different options for changes that were not straightforward to compare as they covered different aspects of the existing Carer’s Allowance benefit.

The purpose of the Multi Criteria Analysis (MCA) was to ensure that a wide range of factors were considered to assess the options for Scottish Carer’s Assistance. The process involved discussion events with representatives from a range of organisations, and different areas of government policy, as well as interviews with members of the Experience Panels¹.

We have provided more information below on the process, including the full list of options which were included and the criteria used to assess the options. The options list was based on a range of work with carers and support organisations, work with our Carer Benefits Advisory Group², and advice from the Disability and Carer Benefits Expert Advisory Group³.

The list of options to be considered was also updated based on feedback from the discussion events. Feedback from the events also informed the final assessment criteria and the importance weights given to the criteria. The criteria and weights reflect points raised regarding the importance of improving carer incomes – including the lowest income carers in particular - protecting existing support, including reserved benefit support, keeping application processes simple, removing barriers to work, and promoting take-up. The final 18 assessment criteria and weightings used are set out in **Table 2** below.

The options ranking process

Each of the 15 options were assessed and ranked against each of the 18 criteria. A summary of the assessment of each option is in **Table 3**. A ‘sensitivity analysis’ of the rankings was also carried out. This tests the weighting of the assessment criteria by shifting weights to see whether there are impacts on the overall ranking, making sure a robust judgement about weighting has been made. The sensitivity testing found that changes to weights did not significantly impact the overall results.

¹ More on our Experience Panels at <https://www.gov.scot/policies/social-security/engagement-on-social-security/>

² More about the Carer Benefits Advisory Group role and membership at <https://www.gov.scot/groups/carers-benefit-advisory-group/>

³ More about the Disability and Carer Benefits Expert Advisory Group role and membership at <https://www.gov.scot/groups/disability-carers-benefits-expert-advisory-group/>

Table 1. Final options considered as part of the Multi Criteria Analysis

Option Group	Option
A. Life events affecting care recipient	Extend the period for which Carer's Allowance is paid after the death of a cared for person.
	Extend the period for which Carer's Allowance is paid after a cared for person is admitted to hospital or residential care.
	Extend the period for which Carer's Allowance is paid after the cared for person loses their relevant qualifying benefit for any reason.
B. Eligibility thresholds (earnings/ education)	Increase the earnings threshold link it to working hours per week and an hourly wage rate.
	Remove the earnings threshold and introduce an hours per week threshold.
	Remove the rule that prevents carers in full-time education from receiving Carer's Allowance.
C. Earnings stability	Introduce a taper rate so that the award is reduced gradually as earnings exceed the weekly threshold.
	Introduce a run-on period after earnings exceed the earnings threshold, with gradual reductions of the award over a period of time.
D. Care requirements and responsibilities	Allow carers to add together hours spent caring for more than one person to reach the 35 hours per week caring requirement ⁴ .
	Allow more than one person to claim Carer's Allowance for the same cared for person where they meet all of the other eligibility criteria.
	Reduce the caring hours requirement from 35 hours per week to 20 hours per week.
E. Underlying entitlement / unpaid carers recognition	Continue to pay Carer's Allowance to carers in receipt of State Pension (currently as Carer's Allowance and State Pension are 'overlapping benefits' carers can't receive both).
	Introduce a Carer Recognition Payment to be paid to carers with 'underlying entitlement' to Carer's Allowance due to the overlapping benefits rule.
	Introduce a Carer Recognition Payment for all carers caring for at least 20 hours per week.
	Replace the requirement that a cared for person is in receipt of a qualifying benefit with verification from an approved third party that the carer is providing 35 hours or more of care a week to a cared for person.

⁴ Additional hours from caring for more than one person at the same time cannot be counted towards the total of 35 hours per week at the moment.

Table 2. Assessment criteria

Overarching Criteria Sets		Criteria	Description	Final Weight
Dignity and Respect	1	Simplicity and Transparency	Assess how likely the option is to be straightforward, unambiguous and easy for Social Security Scotland to communicate and for carers to use. Assess how likely each option is to keep the application process simple.	10%
	2	Carer experience of the system	Evaluate how likely the option is to make carers feel they are recognised for their contribution, and can rely on Scottish Carer's Assistance to provide stable support, and how likely it is to improve the perception of carers.	5%
	3	Flexibility	Assess how well the option is likely to support changes to be built upon and enable a 'learning system'.	5%
Equality and Poverty	4	Interaction with equality characteristics	Assess how well each option would interact with carer groups who have specific needs. Equality characteristics and priority groups such as those identified in the tackling child poverty delivery plan will be considered.	5.25%
	5	Income & Poverty	Assess how likely the option is to increase incomes of carers in the most need.	5.25%
	6	Take-up	Evaluate how likely each option is to increase take-up of Scottish Carer's Assistance.	4.5%
Efficiency and Alignment	7	Interaction with reserved benefits	Assess how each option interacts with the reserved benefit system. This includes assessing how each option is likely to have an impact on reserved benefits, require new or amended legislation on DWP's side and risk direct and behavioural 'spillover' effects.	7.5%
	8	Alignment with devolved public services	Assess how efficiently each option would be embedded in the current system of devolved policies and programmes...	3.75%
	9	Fraud and error	Evaluate how efficiently each option could respond to system controls and fraud and error prevention processes.	6.25%
	10	External Exposure and Liability	Assess how likely the option is to be affected by policy changes to benefits currently reserved to DWP and HMRC.	5%
	11	Internal Exposure and Liability	Assess how likely the option is to be exposed to policy changes in devolved disability benefits.	2.5%

Implementation and Risk	12	Scale of Change and Timings	Assess how quickly the option is likely to be delivered. This is an assessment of the preparation required for the benefit to be delivered, including technological solutions and operational skills, legislation and analytical work to scope options further.	9%
	13	Scale of Policy Cost	Assess the scale of the cost of each option, including 'spillover' cost (where possible).	12%
	14	Delivery and Operational Risk	Evaluate how well the option is likely to be delivered given the impact on the Social Security Programme and on the Reserved Benefits system.	4.5%
	15	Policy Risk	Evaluate how likely the option is to introduce upside risks to policy expenditure.	4.5%
Economy and Society	16	Social Outcomes	Evaluate how well each option is likely to improve social outcomes for carers and care recipients, including education, health and wellbeing.	5%
	17	Employment Prospects	Assess how likely the option is to improve carers' prospects in the labour market. This could look at time and financial investment in training and learning opportunities as well as expenses associated with work.	4%
	18	Access to Work	Assess how likely the option is to support carers to enter the labour market or increase hours of work if they wish to.	1%

Table 3. Assessment of options – Summary of analysis from MCA process

Option	Summary of analysis from MCA process
Extend the period for which Scottish Carer's Assistance is paid following the death of the cared for person.	This option would provide stability at a difficult time, and it ranked well on three out of the five criteria sets. It is simple to communicate whilst also being relatively low cost, with minimal risk e.g. with regards to reserved benefits, fraud and error, or due to behavioural impacts. This policy is most likely to affect carers looking after older care recipients. Although the timing is good in terms of when it would support carers, it is not anticipated to have a large effect on equality or poverty.
Extend the period for which Scottish Carer's Assistance is paid after a cared for person is admitted to hospital or residential care.	For the most part this option has the same advantages and disadvantages as for the option above, very marginal differences in scoring are due to alignment with other policies and because the caring relationship is not ending.
Extend the period for which Carer's Allowance is paid after the cared for person loses their relevant qualifying benefit for any reason.	This would provide more stability for carers and shares similar advantages and disadvantages with the above options, though carers may have to report new changes to Social Security Scotland, which would not be the case with the other two options looking at extending periods of support. It would however, apply to potentially all recipients, being more targeted at those caring for children and people of working age, given their relevant disability benefits are more likely to be affected by reviews. This would be a larger and more complex change than other options to extend support after the death or hospitalisation of a cared for person.
Increase the earnings threshold and link it to working hours per week and an hourly wage rate.	The option ranked in the middle or higher across the criteria sets. It is expected to be clear and easy to communicate as a change to the existing earnings threshold improving stability for carers who are working, although it would retain the 'cliff edge' of the existing threshold. It is of greater benefit to carers that do want to work longer hours on a more permanent basis than some of the other options in this area, allowing carers to increase earnings, and potentially reducing the number who lose entitlement due to changing earnings. It is expected to fit well with existing employability policies, and is low risk in terms of fraud and error as earnings could potentially be monitored with existing data. Operationally this is substantially easier than a threshold based on hours, and it is expected to be an easier change to make than the run on or taper, although this depends on the level of the threshold.

Option	Summary of analysis from MCA process
<p>Remove the earnings threshold and introduce an hours per week threshold.</p>	<p>This option would fit well with fair work commitments. It has more potential to increase incomes relative to other options and would allow for career progression and higher wage work although it still leaves a 'cliff edge' albeit in hours. It could result in tax interactions for some carers and is less well targeted at equality due to its preferential treatment for higher earners. Its operation is likely to be significantly more challenging requiring a new system to be developed. This is a higher risk option as it has the largest potential to generate behavioural and spillover effects among the work related options.</p>
<p>Remove the rule that prevents carers in full-time education from receiving Carer's Allowance.</p>	<p>This option could help to provide stability and improve future employment prospects, particularly for younger carers. Ranking varied across criteria within the five criteria sets. It is likely to be relatively inexpensive in terms of benefit costs, and deliverable in a shorter space of time (though interactions with student finance would need to be carefully considered), and it is straightforward to communicate. It could also align well with wider student carer support. It is more targeted towards young adults, who are more likely to be in relative poverty, than other options, and will also help carers, who are potentially less able to work than other students, out of term time. Primarily we expect it to benefit carers who are already in part-time education, allowing them to extend their hours. As there are a relatively small number of unpaid carers combining care with full time education, large behavioural effects are not anticipated although for the same reason it also means the option scores in the middle for equality and poverty.</p>
<p>Introduce a taper rate so that the award is reduced gradually as earnings exceed the weekly threshold.</p>	<p>This option would address problems around the current earnings 'cliff edge'. Its rankings varied across individual criteria within each of the five criteria sets. It could support carers with permanently higher earnings to remain in work or keep their support, and again it fits well with wider employability policy. It ranked lower than changes to the threshold as it is less likely to support carers into work.</p>
<p>Introduce a run-on period after earnings exceed the earnings threshold, with gradual reductions of the award over a period of time.</p>	<p>Like the taper option, and scoring very similarly across criteria, this would remove the 'cliff edge' earnings threshold in Carer's Allowance, helping carers to remain in work and retain support although it would do more to help the issue of carers earning over the threshold temporarily. Among the earnings options this option is expected to be more difficult to design and communicate, and for carers to use.</p>

Option	Summary of analysis from MCA process
<p>Allow more than one person to claim Carer's Allowance for the same cared for person where they meet all of the other eligibility criteria.</p>	<p>This option would make policy more consistent in that having two caring roles which add up to 35+ hours is likely to have similar impacts on a carer as a single 35+ hour role. The size and composition of the group of carers who would be affected is not well understood due to limited information. For this reason it has been difficult to score the policy against several of the criteria, leading to a higher risk being associated with this option.. While it is straightforward to understand as an option, it would add complexity for carers, in that having two cared for people would mean, for example, two times as many potential changes in circumstances. This also means that it would take longer to build systems to accommodate this option.</p>
<p>Allow more than one person to claim Carer's Allowance for the same cared for person where they meet all of the other eligibility criteria.</p>	<p>Ranked low across most criteria, an exception being take up, as existing recipients could encourage and support those they share care with from the newly eligible group to apply. The policy would add complexity to applications and operations as having two carers for the same person is likely to require new checks on the caring situation, which would be a significant shift in how the benefit currently works. It is expected to largely benefit parent carers in couples, but could exclude people providing long hours of care by themselves, such as lone parents. While more carers could receive support, they would face earnings restrictions so impacts on income and employability could be mixed. The numbers potentially affected by this policy are very uncertain, with the change presenting a higher risk to linked support in reserved benefits relative to other options and with potential to substantially interact with any other changes.</p>
<p>Reduce the 35 hours a week caring requirement to 20 hours a week.</p>	<p>Ranks low across most criteria sets with the exception of employability – as it could support those caring fewer hours to combine care and work. While it wouldn't add complexity to applications, reduced hours may be more difficult to communicate, and could be viewed negatively by existing recipients, a large number of whom report caring for significantly more than 35 hours a week. The policy is unlikely to be targeted at those in most need or with the most intensive caring roles. Those caring around 20 hours rather than 35+ may be more able to combine caring with work or education making issues associated with other eligibility criteria such as the earnings threshold more problematic for the new group. As a significant expansion of eligibility, it is likely to be challenging to agree linked support to reserved benefits relative to the other options. The change could generate a large number of applications, have high costs and significant impacts on wider delivery, with numbers being very uncertain.</p>

Option	Summary of analysis from MCA process
<p>Pay Scottish Carer's Assistance to carers in receipt of State Pension</p>	<p>This option is similar to the recognition payment for the underlying entitled group below in many ways, many of the difficulties with this option are potentially exacerbated by a larger payment and here it would be a significant shift from the income replacement purpose of Carer's Allowance.</p>
<p>Introduce a Carer Recognition Payment to be paid to carers with 'underlying entitlement' to Carer's Allowance due to the overlapping benefits rule.</p>	<p>This group does not receive Carer's Allowance due to the overlapping benefits rule, and the majority in this group are in receipt of State Pension. It would provide recognition and increased support for older carers, many of whom care for long hours. As a group they are more likely to be disabled but the policy is not targeted at the lowest income carers as the 65+ group are less likely to be in poverty than working age carers. Due to its being a separate benefit, interactions with the reserved system are less problematic and because of underlying entitlement the size of the potentially eligible group is better understood although the policy would still require new systems to be built, it is mostly scored better than the other recognition payment due to its being thought to be operationally simpler and lower risk.</p>
<p>Introduce a Carer Recognition Payment for all carers caring for at least 20 hours per week.</p>	<p>This option scores well for recognising the group caring for 20 to 35 hours, given evidence that longer caring relationships have larger impacts on carers, although due to being a recognition payment wider impacts on outcomes are expected to be limited. There is significantly more uncertainty associated with the 20 hours + group than in the case of the other recognition payment making it a relatively riskier option, although both are unencumbered by CA linkages e.g. to reserved benefits.</p>
<p>Replace the requirement that a cared for person is in receipt of a qualifying benefit with verification from an approved third party that the carer is providing 35 hours or more of care a week to a cared for person. This would allow those caring for someone not on a disability benefit to get support.</p>	<p>Ranks low across all criteria, except for internal exposure and liability, due to its breaking the link between disability benefits and Scottish Carer's Assistance - it wouldn't be affected by Scottish Government changes to disability benefits. This would be a fundamental shift away from the current benefit requiring a new way to verify the caring role, and hence it is expected to present high risks across the criteria. New systems would need to be developed adding significant complexity to the benefit and presenting large operational challenges. Whilst there are some specific groups currently unable to get Carer's Allowance such as those caring for people with addictions, it is not clear how the removal of condition requirements in favour of a broader definition of disability would improve the targeting of the benefit, particularly given Scottish Government responsibility for disability benefit policy. It is not clear that carers policy would be the right place to address an eligibility issue of this kind given what it would do to the simplicity of the benefit and with divergences in treatment raising questions about the need for care when a cared for person isn't eligible for disability assistance.</p>