

Responses to Programme for Government

The response to the First Minister's first Programme for Government is mixed, but broadly positive from the comments we have found.

There are a few caveats sprinkled among them, and one criticism is that this is a missed opportunity.

The programme which Humza Yousaf announced to The Scottish Parliament on Tuesday afternoon was billed by The Scottish Government as one which will tackle poverty and economic growth.

Debate about the programme will continue in the chamber on Wednesday.

Meantime the First Minister has written to all Cabinet Secretaries making sure that they all individually recognise their roles in achieving the aims of the programme. [The letters are very similar and each one can be read here.](#)

The comments include these:

INDEPENDENT AGE

Debbie Horne, Scotland Policy and Public Affairs Manager at

Independent Age said: “Today is a missed opportunity to help the 150,000 older people living in poverty across Scotland. Alarming, this figure has risen by 25% in the last decade alone, with the ongoing costs crisis squeezing the budgets of those in later life to breaking point. The First Minister should have used today’s Programme for Government to announce a strategy to tackle pensioner poverty and reverse this frightening trend.

“None of us dream of a later life where, because of the cost, we risk falls by not turning on the lights or are forced to skip meals, yet this is now a reality for 1 in 7 older people. With over 3 in 5 over 65s on a low income currently cutting their food spending, and almost 3 in 4 reducing their heating, they’re terrified for the winter to come.

“The Scottish Government should reconsider this glaring omission from today’s announcement and urgently announce a plan to reduce financial hardship in later life. They’ve said that tackling poverty is a key priority – older people must not be forgotten in this.”

FOOD AND DRINK FEDERATION SCOTLAND

Food and Drink Federation Scotland’s Chief Executive Officer, David Thomson, said: “It has been a challenging few years for Scotland’s vital food and drink manufacturers. The Scottish Government must work with us to ensure our industry thrives in Scotland’s transition to a Wellbeing Economy.

“It is positive to see the First Minister’s commitment to work with Scottish businesses to remove regulations that are no longer required and to ensure that they are involved at the earliest stage of policy development.

“The establishment of a Small Business Unit is welcome. It is vital that our food and drink manufacturers – of which 95% are SMEs – are represented in this work to ensure their views are

heard.

“The way in which new laws and policies are made over the next year will be a real test to whether the relationship between Scottish Government and business has strengthened.”

REFORM SCOTLAND

Alison Payne, Research Director of Reform Scotland, a public policy institute working to promote increased economic prosperity said: “There are some positive steps and measures to feel optimistic about in today’s statement. The apparent recognition that economic growth underpins better public services and other government expenditure, and the First Minister’s desire to inject more flexibility into the currently rather rigid childcare provision were both welcome, and we look forward to contributing to those agendas as they progress.

“Furthermore, the First Minister’s forthcoming request for the UK Government to devolve Corporation Tax is something which we enthusiastically support.

“However, the Programme was not without its frustrations. Empowering local authorities to levy a premium council tax on second homes is a move towards decentralisation, but a more fundamental devolution of local taxation is the only logical and acceptable end-point. Tinkering with council tax is just that – tinkering.

“Unfortunately, detail on the critical policy areas of energy, health and schools was severely lacking.

“So whilst the statement was largely encouraging, it was also largely vague, and we look forward to the First Minister and his team placing more flesh on the bones in the coming weeks and months.”

SCVO

Anna Fowlie, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations' (SCVO) Chief Executive, said: "The First Minister has today set out a Programme for Government (PfG) which outlines priorities for Scotland which voluntary organisations working in and for communities have welcomed. While the PfG recognises the contribution voluntary organisations make across different portfolios, it doesn't move far or fast enough to address fundamental changes to the operating environment that would recognise the vital role of Scotland's voluntary sector in delivering on government priorities.

"Today's PfG restates the Scottish Government's commitment to Fairer Funding for the voluntary sector, which we welcome. The Scottish Government's current poor grant-making practice makes the focus on improving the clarity and consistency of existing approaches very important, but we must continue to work together to support the sector to be financially sustainable. To secure the future of the invaluable work our sector delivers, we must not only address disappointing practice, but also implement the longer-term improvements that are so desperately needed.

"We can't forget that an on-paper commitment to Fairer Funding was made by ministers earlier this year. It is disappointing that progress on this commitment has been so slow. Today's announcement commits to developing a plan, when urgent action is needed. Our long-term work on Fair Funding provides clear recommendations, based on the sector's experiences, and a clear blueprint for next steps.

"The PfG's firm commitment to taking forward a wider review of charity law is also welcome, particularly the commitment to work alongside the sector. It is important that the review is comprehensive and independent and doesn't shy away from fundamental issues. We need a holistic approach to regulating

the voluntary sector that supports the role of modern charities.

“With charities experiencing growing frustration at the funding relationship with Scottish Government and the impact this is having on organisations, staff, volunteers, and the services and support they offer, we had hoped for more action and urgency. The steps outlined will move us in the right direction, albeit slowly, and we will of course work with the Scottish Government to ensure that they do so in the ways that make the biggest difference to voluntary organisations across Scotland, supporting the invaluable contribution they make to Scotland’s economy and society.”

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS

A spokesperson for the National Union of Students said: “This Programme for Government includes many positive steps forward for students...We again welcome the scrapping of peak time rail fares, especially as a fifth of students have missed class because of the cost of public transport... We are also delighted with the Government’s announcement that part-time and flexible students will receive increased parity in financial support when compared to full-time students...We strongly welcome the introduction of long-term rent controls and increased rights for renters, as this will benefit the thousands of students renting in the private rental sector.”

THE TRUSSELL TRUST

A spokesperson for The Trussell Trust Scotland said: “We’re delighted to hear @HumzaYousaf urge the UK Govt to deliver an Essentials Guarantee. Our social security system should always provide enough money for people to afford #OurEssentials #PfG. By endorsing the introduction of an Essentials Guarantee, the Scottish Government has shown the ambition for ending the need for food banks that we want to see replicated in Westminster”

ASH SCOTLAND

Sheila Duffy, ASH Scotland: “We welcome today’s Programme for Government announcement by the First Minister, @HumzaYousaf, that a consultation on banning the sale of disposable e-cigarettes will be carried out by the Scottish Government.”

SCDI

A spokesperson for the Scottish Council for Development and Industry (SCDI) said: “We support the focus on creating a wellbeing economy, on economic growth and the investment in childcare which is key to enabling more people to access meaningful work...Implementation of the new deal for business recommendations will contribute to regaining the trust of Scottish businesses and strengthen the partnerships needed to unlock sustainable and inclusive growth.”

ONE PARENT FAMILIES SCOTLAND

A number of the announcements today will have a positive impact for single parent families, however in other areas the Scottish Government could have gone further and One Parent Families Scotland say they will continue to urge them to do so.

Director of Policy, Strategy and Communications at One Parent Families Scotland Marion Davis said:“We welcome the strong focus in the programme for government on the importance of tackling poverty, which we know impacts disproportionately on single parents and their children.

“We are pleased that social security benefits including Scottish Child Payment will increase in line with inflation and that the government will continue to invest in reaching more families with the Scottish Child Payment.

“However, it is a matter of urgency that this be increased to at least £30 and ultimately by £40 within this parliament if the government is to meet its targets on reducing child poverty and provide much needed support to families struggling with the cost of life’s basic essentials.

“Alongside this, we and many organisations supporting children and families in Scotland continue to call on the government to provide targeted top-ups through the Scottish Child Payment to reduce the harms of unfair UK Government policies such as the lower rate of Universal Credit for under 25s and the two-child limit.

“It is encouraging that the government will invest in testing approaches to childcare from nine months throughout primary within six local areas and will expand access to childcare for two-year-olds. Increased investment in flexible, affordable, high-quality childcare is vital for single parents.

“However, this progress must be accelerated, and we would call on the government to provide clear commitments on timescales for rolling out these expansions across Scotland. Action is urgently needed to create a system of funded school-age childcare, with qualified staff, whilst committing to the ambition of up to 50 hours of early years childcare.

“We also strongly welcome the commitment to improving the wages of workers in the sector which is currently undervalued and predominantly female, this investment will be vital for gender equality, for giving children the best start in life, and for supporting an essential part of the Scottish economy.

“We were disappointed that other key actions which could have helped reduce inequality in Scotland were not announced, including fairer taxation to address the increased cost of living and climate crisis which is supported by the public and even by many millionaires.

“Furthermore, the government’s commitment to expand free

school meals to primary six and sevens has been delayed until 2026. At a time when so many families are struggling to get by, this is a delay that many can ill afford.

“Overall, despite steps in the right direction and a positive understanding of the importance of supporting children and families, this is a programme of government which could – and should – have gone much further in recognition of the bleak situation facing too many families today.”

UNISON

UNISON’s Scottish secretary, Lilian Macer said: “Public service workers will feel left behind in today’s programme for government.

“Our public services are in crisis and the staff delivering them are burnt out. We have a staffing crisis in the NHS with the longest waiting lists in generations; schools and colleges face impending industrial action; and there is unprecedented pressure on social services due to continual underfunding of local government. Our emergency services face huge budget pressures with fire stations facing cuts, a crisis in ambulance waiting times and job freezes in Police Scotland.

“We had hoped for more from the First Minister programme today, it does little to meet the big challenges facing Scotland’s public services.”