Social citizenship in an age of welfare regionalism
The state of the social union

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The social rights of citizenship

The whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society.

TH Marshall
Development of citizenship

Civil rights

Political rights

Social rights

Hannah Miller
2010-2019: a decade of austerity

Local housing allowance cut (private tenants)

‘Bedroom tax’ (social tenants)

Benefit cap introduced

Benefit cap lowered

Contributory employment and support allowance

Hannah Miller

HM Treasury

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After 2012: the changing social union
The social union

‘The pooling of common funds at a UK level which are then expended on the basis of need, on a UK-wide basis.’

House of Lords Constitution Committee
All in this together?

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Constitutional change

Scotland Act 1998: social security reserved
Scotland Act 2016: disability and carer benefits devolved; power to top up UK benefits
NIA s87: The Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Minister… shall… consult one another with a view to securing that, to the extent agreed between them, the legislation… provides single systems of social security… for the United Kingdom.
New payments at devolved level

**Scotland**
- Disability assistance
- Carer’s allowance supplement
- Scottish child payment
- Best start grant/foods
- Funeral support payment
- Scottish welfare fund
- Winter heating assistance
  
  *Carer’s assistance to follow*

**Northern Ireland**
- Welfare supplementary payments compensate for loss due to:
  - Social sector size criteria
  - Benefit cap
  - DLA → PIP transition
  - Time limiting of contrib. ESA

**Discretionary support scheme**
The vision

Social security is itself a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights.

Respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system.

The Scottish social security system is to contribute to reducing poverty in Scotland.

Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018
The purpose of this Article is to enable the Department to make payments to persons who suffer financial disadvantage as a result of the changes to social security benefits and tax credits contained in this Order, the Welfare Reform and Work (Northern Ireland) Order 2016 and the Welfare Reform Act 2012.

- Welfare Reform (NI) Order 2015
What’s driving the new approach?

Two waves of fieldwork
Qualitative interviews with expert informants

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>2014-15</th>
<th>2020</th>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>19 NI, 17 Scotland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
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<td>19 politicians, 15 officials</td>
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<td>Political</td>
<td>8 unionist, 9 nationalist, 1 neutral</td>
<td>9 unionist, 8 nationalist, 2 neutral</td>
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NI: pragmatic considerations

• ‘The desire isn’t to be different. The desire is to have something which is appropriate … because we do have unique circumstances’ (unionist politician)

• ‘We don’t actually have a housing market that enables people to downsize’ (neutral politician)

• Deprivation brings risk of ‘breakdowns in society … unrest and that’s the last thing we need here’ (official)
Scotland: ideological considerations

- ‘This idea of the common weal and the good of the people and looking after people, it has been part of the Scottish psyche for so long ... we’ve always had a left of centre outlook on life’ (nationalist politician)

- ‘We are on a journey and I actually think the more we say it, the more we become it... fake it until you make it’ (unionist politician)

- ‘Scottish Nats have got a very clear view about what they want and the idea of a ‘Fairer Scotland’ ... a political party which has debated the idea around social welfare and which is creating forums for discussion around social welfare. There’s none of that in Northern Ireland’ (NI official)
Questions of ‘fairness’

‘The [Welfare Reform] Bill says to the taxpayer, “Your hard-earned money must be spent responsibly” … Taxpayers … are constantly being asked to pay in taxes towards support for others. That is fair, but we have a responsibility to ensure that taxpayers too are properly supported’ (Iain Duncan Smith)

‘If you can’t be arsed to get out of your bed … you don’t get paid’ (neutral politician, NI)

‘People have an entitlement to benefit support that comes from the contract that is there between the government and the citizen, that it is something that we collectively all contribute to… in order that it is there for us, should we ever need it’ (nationalist politician, Scotland)
Welfare unionism and nationalism

‘Doing social security right has the potential to be one of the strongest arguments for Scottish independence this Government has yet been able to manifest [and] a headline argument in future debates around the constitutional question, if we can demonstrate that we can do it’ (official, Scotland)

‘I think being a nationalist means you’re more likely to be a member of a left of centre party, which means you’re more likely to be opposed to elements of welfare reform, but I don’t think they’re necessarily linked in the sense of a constitutional question’ (unionist politician, NI)
So what is the state of the social union?
Social citizenship in a ‘shared space’

‘There’s no sense having devolution if Ministers are basically just rubber stamping what comes across … We’ve all gradually grown in this together … There’s a pragmatic issue around parity that people get, but we can tweak things’ (NI official)

‘I think our systems will stay broadly similar … We can be that little bit more generous if we wish to… I think the general expectation is a shared one across our country, and I think it will remain so for some time’ (unionist politician, Scotland)

‘There is no longer a single UK welfare state… All social security provisions will eventually end up in the Scottish Parliament’ (nationalist politician, Scotland)