

TV Licences for the over 75s

Scottish Government debate: S5M-19967

21st November 2019

Introduction

Since 2000 any individual aged 75 or over has been entitled to a concessionary TV licence. In 2015 the UK Government decided to transfer the costs of the concessionary licence to the BBC as part of a wider agreement regarding the licence fee. The current concession arrangement will cease in 2020 meaning it will be funded by the BBC rather than the government.

This is despite the fact maintaining free TV licences for over-75s was a 2017 Conservative manifesto commitment.

The BBC launched a 12 week consultation on the future of the licence fee which closed on 12th February 2019. The BBC has since announced that they plan to means test TV licences for the over 75s. That means they'll only be free for people receiving Pension Credit. **As a result more than 300,000 over-75s in Scotland will lose their free TV licence.**¹

The UK has the lowest State Pension of all the most advanced economies in the world.² As a result, the concessionary TV licence was largely understood to be a 'top up' entitlement to over 75s. We need to see more support for older people, not less.

Key Points

Over 75s in Scotland

There are more than 442,000 over 75s in Scotland. By 2041 there will be a 79% increase in the number of people in this age group.

Conservative Manifesto

Maintaining free TV licences for over-75s was a 2017 commitment in the Conservative's manifesto.

Pensioner Poverty

180,000 Scottish pensioners live in relative poverty. Our research has found that **four in ten** people over 50 feel financially squeezed, and that six in ten pensioners who live alone find it difficult to pay their fuel bill.

Pension Credit

Pension Credit is a top up benefit for older people who are on a low pension income. **Currently only 40% of those eligible claim it.**

Loneliness

Age Scotland found that **100,000 older people in Scotland** feel lonely all or most of the time, and that **about half of over 75s say that their main form of company is the TV** or a pet.

¹ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/scotland/latest-news/2019/june/more-than-300000-over-75s-in-scotland-will-lose-free-tv-licence/>

² <http://www.oecd.org/els/public-pensions/oecd-pensions-at-a-glance-19991363.htm>

Age Scotland's position

Working alongside our sister charity Age UK on the 'Switched Off' campaign, we believe free TV licences for over 75s is a form of welfare policy that the BBC should never have agreed to take responsibility for. Over 600,000 people across the UK have signed our petition to save free TV for older people.³ By removing or changing the benefit eligibility in any way will negatively impact the lives of many older people, especially those on low and fixed incomes.

The agreement made by the BBC and the UK Government was done with no public consultation and we believe they should take back responsibility for funding the licence for those aged 75 and over.

It is not appropriate for a public broadcaster to be making decisions about who should be entitled to concessions which in reality is part of the country's welfare state.

In Age Scotland's General Election Manifesto we are calling for the next UK Government to work with the BBC to ensure that the free TV licence remains available for everybody aged over 75.⁴

Means Testing TV licences

The decision to means test TV licences for the over 75s, whilst intended to help some of the poorest pensioners will have the unintended consequence of excluding the very people the BBC are trying to reach. Pension Credit is an important top up benefit for pensioners on a very low income. However, it is a massively underclaimed benefit, with Department for Work and Pensions estimating that only 40% of those eligible to claim it do.⁵

In Scotland alone, there are an estimated 122,598 households entitled to, but not receiving Pension Credit.⁶ This may be for a multitude of reasons, such as older people not knowing what they're entitled to, or they may be put off by the application or process, or feel there is stigma associated with claiming benefits. Secondly, the proposal would, therefore, have the unintended consequence of excluding those on the very lowest incomes i.e. those entitled to Pension Credit but do not claim it, and those who are marginally above the threshold.

The new 'mixed-aged couple' rules introduced in May 2019 regarding Pension Credit could also result in people who are 75 unable to receive a free TV licence as they will be unable to claim Pension Credit until their partner reaches their State Pension Age. This is a very problematic policy as it sees older people who would normally have been assessed as on a low income and eligible for Pension Credit unable to claim as their partner is not of pensionable age. This will result in older people on low incomes struggling for longer, and with the added financial strain of now paying for a TV licence. It is expected that this change will have a devastating impact on

³ <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/campaigning/save-free-tv-for-older-people/>

⁴ [Age.scot/GE19](https://www.age.scot/GE19)

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/income-related-benefits-estimates-of-take-up-financial-year-2016-to-2017>

⁶ <https://www.independentage.org/credit-where-its-due-pension-credit>

some of Scotland's poorest pensioners and will affect as many as 5,600 households in Scotland by 2023-24.⁷

Pensioner Poverty

Many thousands of pensioners already struggle to make ends meet, in Scotland 180,000 pensioners live in relative poverty.⁸ Age Scotland's Money Matters Project found that many older people in Scotland are financially struggling, with **four in ten people over the age of fifty reporting that they feel financially squeezed**, and Age Scotland's survey on the housing needs of older people found that **six in ten pensioners who live alone reporting they have difficulty paying their fuel bill**. Having another new bill to pay could put many below the poverty line or further into poverty. Older people over 75 who may very well have paid into the system all their adult life shouldn't have to make the choice between their TV or another utility bill.

This financial strain can also be further exasperated by any disability or long term health conditions that they may be living with. The proportion of adults with a long-term limiting health condition or disability is increasing, as the population ages –more than four fifths of people aged 85 years and over have reported that their daily lives are limited by a long-term health problem of disability.⁹ This is important as there are numerous extra costs associated with having a disability or long-term condition such as taxis to medical appointments, specialist equipment and receiving support and care.

We know that about **half of over 75s say that their main form of company is the TV or a pet**. Our research has found that **100,000 older people in Scotland feel lonely all or most of the time, and with nearly 7 out of 10 people over 75 not using the Internet, TV helps them stay connected**.¹⁰ For older people who may live on their own, struggle to leave their homes due to mobility or who have limited support systems, a friendly face on the TV can brighten their day and improve their quality of life.

We demand that the UK Government takes back the funding and administration of the free TV licences scheme - and lets the BBC focus on its job of being a national broadcaster.

⁷ <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12277&i=110975#ScotParlOR>

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/poverty-income-inequality-scotland-2015-18/pages/6/>

⁹ <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/People/Equality/Equalities/DataGrid/Disability/DisabPopMig>

¹⁰ <https://beta.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2016-scottish-household-survey/pages/7/>

Want to find out more about our work?

Read and download a copy of Age Scotland's priorities for this election

age.scot/GE19

As Scotland's national charity supporting people over the age of 50, Age Scotland works to improve older people's lives and promote their rights and interests. We aim to help people love later life, whatever their circumstances. We want Scotland to be the best place in the world to grow older.

Our Policy, Communications and Campaigns team research, analyse and comment on a wide range of public policy issues affecting older people in Scotland.

Our work is guided by the views and needs of older people themselves.

Further information

Contact the Age Scotland Policy, Communications and Campaigns team:

policycomms@agescotland.org.uk

0333 323 2400

Twitter [@agescotland](https://twitter.com/agescotland)

Facebook [/agescotland](https://facebook.com/agescotland)

Linkedin [Age-Scotland](https://linkedin.com/company/age-scotland)

www.agescotland.org.uk