

Poll position

With a general election looming we look at how the political parties shape up on your key election issues. Check out the responses and don't forget to vote



Campaigning for

- **Fair Pay**
- **Pensions**
- **Public Services**

Public and Commercial Services Union
www.pcs.org.uk



Scottish National Party



Scottish Socialist Party



United Kingdom Independent Party

The government is planning to cut up to 104,000 civil and public service jobs and have refused to agree a no-compulsory redundancy guarantee. They claim such cuts will not affect services to the public. Where do you stand on cutting civil service jobs and continuing to provide public services?

Unlike the current government, the SNP will never set arbitrary targets for cutting public sector jobs. We favour making government as efficient as possible, but not at the expense of front line services. We want to stimulate economic growth to create a healthy vibrant economy in which the public sector plays a strong part.

The realisation of both of these ambitions will inevitably result in change but, as far as employment is concerned, while it will always be desirable to avoid compulsory redundancy wherever possible, it is not realistic to give an absolute guarantee that some instances will not occur.

The Scottish Socialist Party utterly condemns the government's crazed slaughter of 104,000 civil service jobs. Gordon Brown's butchery is an assault on the livelihoods of workers' families, and a vicious undermining of public services.

We reject New Labour's baloney about cuts creating greater efficiency. You cannot improve frontline services by eradicating 104,000 jobs; so-called back-office jobs are just as vital as the rest of the team who service the public.

Multi-millionaire tax-dodgers deprive the economy of £85 billion a year, yet the government wants to shed 17,000 tax-workers and Customs & Excise jobs, thereby depriving public services of funding.

UKIP is very much the party of small government. While many facets of your function are vital to the smooth running of the economy there is no doubt that, in our view, some are unlikely to pass the cost / benefit test we would apply to the entire service were we to get into government.

Our strategy would be to slim down the public sector, reduce regulation, loosen our ties with Europe and maximise trade with other continents. This would inevitably involve the relocation / retraining of many public sector workers, but that would benefit them as much as it would the wider public and workforce.

PCS is campaigning for a national civil service pay framework, rather than the current arrangement of over 200 separate pay negotiations. Do you support PCS's campaign for greater pay coherence in the civil service?

The SNP supports PCS's campaign for greater pay coherence in the civil service.

It is a national disgrace that people providing vital public services suffer rampant low pay. The SSP believes all workers over 16 should be guaranteed a minimum wage of two-thirds male median earnings (nearly £8 an hour currently).

We condemn the huge differentials created between civil servants doing equivalent jobs through the multitude of separate bargaining units, and we actively support the PCS campaign for national pay bargaining and more unified pay rates across agencies and departments. We believe this would also combat divide-and-rule tactics by employers, strengthening the power of the union to improve wages and conditions of service.

UKIP chose not to answer this question.



The government has proposed changes to the civil service pension scheme; raising the pension age from 60 to 65 and replacing the final salary scheme with an untested whole career scheme. Do you support these proposals?

The SNP opposes the proposed reforms to the civil service pension scheme. These reforms are an attack on the existing pension rights of workers and are being rushed through without sufficient consultation.

The SNP believes that the pension rights of existing scheme members should be protected. These workers were promised certain pension rights and these promises should be honoured. Any changes required to safeguard the sustainability of civil service pensions should only be made after more detailed examination, extensive consultation and on a more gradual basis.

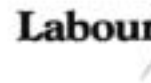
The SSP is the party of trade unionists, with large numbers of PCS members, branch leaders and three PCS NEC members in our ranks. We have been at the heart of organising resistance to Labour's great pensions robbery. Their plan to increase the retirement age by five years means the theft of £20,000 in deferred wages from every worker and cuts of £100 billion.

We oppose attacks on final salary schemes that reduce workers' pensions. We campaign for earlier retirement, on a voluntary basis, from 55 onwards, but with a real choice made available through a real choice available through a decent state pension of at least #175.

UKIP chose not to answer this question.



We asked the Ulster Unionist Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Social and Democratic Labour Party and Sinn Fein the same questions, however they all chose not to comment.



The government is planning to cut up to 104,000 civil and public service jobs and have refused to agree a no-compulsory redundancy guarantee. They claim such cuts will not affect services to the public. Where do you stand on cutting civil service jobs and continuing to provide public services?

Under our 'value for money action plan', the number of people employed in public service posts will reduce, but not one frontline job will be removed. 91,000 of these jobs will be transferred to the private sector, with terms and conditions protected under "TUPE" legislation. Further reductions will be achieved through the operation of the civil service recruitment freeze. The remaining reductions will be achieved exclusively through a voluntary redundancy programme.

We have set aside funding for gross voluntary redundancy packages of an average of £68,000 - over three times the average civil service salary.

This looks like a crowd-pleasing measure aimed at cutting a hefty civil service payroll. These services will still need to be provided and we are concerned that this is political sleight of hand aimed at taking jobs out of the public sector and outsourcing them to the private sector. It's being sold as cutting red tape. In fact it's a flimsy cover for probable privatisation.

Unlike the Tories who are committed, by 2008, to cut 239,000 civil service jobs as part of a programme of £35 billion cuts to public services, Labour will be employing over 143,000 more frontline health workers, over 33,000 more criminal justice workers and 55,000 more early years and childcare workers. Additionally, the Tories would scrap the New Deal and privatise Jobcentre Plus.

Ministers and officials have met frequently with unions to discuss the broader implications of efficiency on the civil service and its employees. Every effort will be made to avoid compulsory redundancies - voluntary redundancies and recruitment freezes will play a key role. Departments are currently discussing re-skilling and redeployment opportunities with staff and with unions.

PCS is campaigning for a national civil service pay framework, rather than the current arrangement of over 200 separate pay negotiations. Do you support PCS's campaign for greater pay coherence in the civil service?

We are committed to decentralising the management of public services. In areas of higher living costs staff should be able to negotiate appropriate terms and conditions. There are significant efficiencies if the range of benefits is coherent across organisations so that shared service centres can administer them. This does not require all staff to receive the same level of benefit, merely a single menu.

Commercial best practice would enable staff to select benefits from a range of options to best suit their personal circumstances, up to a negotiated agreed limit for each employee.

It's always easier for people to access information about their rights if the framework is simple and clear. PCS's campaign seems eminently sensible and worth supporting.



Labour agrees with PCS that there is merit in greater coherence in current delegated arrangements and that there are opportunities for reducing the fragmentation in current bargaining arrangements.

We want to improve the operation of pay delegation working in partnership with PCS and are taking this forward through strategic meetings with the Cabinet Office and Treasury. We have agreed a framework and timeframe for implementation which includes:

- Broadly common pay ranges for certain administrative grade equivalents
- A broad set of performance management and reward principles with some flexibility on the application of progression systems within these pay ranges
- Terms and conditions where limits on divergence would be desirable

The government has proposed changes to the civil service pension scheme; raising the pension age from 60 to 65 and replacing the final salary scheme with an untested whole career scheme. Do you support these proposals?

We have no current plans to alter existing public sector schemes but we recognise this is an issue of growing importance for public sector workers and we will be conducting our own review. We know there is some concern over extending the public sector retirement age and we will listen to practical concerns.

The Greens support a flexible retirement age. The government needs to solve the problem of how people can hold onto their final salary pension while also ensuring they have a flexible way out of work.

Many public sector workers would be willing to work beyond 60 if their pay and conditions were better throughout their career. For some workers though, especially those in heavy physical or stressful jobs, to continue beyond 60 would be akin to cruel and unnatural punishment

Labour is committed to maintaining and developing attractive pensions for public sector workers in the 21st century. We can only do that if we ensure that all schemes are properly funded and fully affordable.

Labour's reforms are in the interest of public sector workers - today and tomorrow. Labour is determined to protect the position of existing employees; that is why they will not be affected by the changes until 2013.

Labour is working with the public sector trade unions, including PCS, to ensure that the system works and is fair to all. We are determined to improve pension provision for those in the public sector who currently lose out, for example, part time women workers or unmarried partners.



The proposed 20% cut in civil service jobs is based on little rational analysis. The DWP, for example, is a department whose staff are overworked, underpaid and under trained rather than overstuffed.

If these cuts are based on a logical needs analysis, rather than a Tory style electioneering figure plucked out of the air, why can the government still not tell us exactly where the job losses are to fall?

The DfES is taking on an expanded role but is sacking 33% of its staff. As we have asked on the Education and Skills Select Committee, where is the logic?

The proposed cuts are going to impact very badly on local economies and local services within Wales. The Welsh economy is heavily reliant on civil service jobs.

Around 3,000 of the 6,000 job losses in Wales are to come from closing benefit processing centres and in some weird "New Labour" way these cuts, we are told, will improve client services.

The geography and infrastructure in Wales means the public cannot always access the services they need in their locality. The proposed closures will make things far worse.

The silence from the New Labour benches on this issue is absolutely deafening.

Respect is completely opposed to the government's proposals to slash civil service jobs. We do not believe any redundancies are justified. We believe civil servants provide essential public services that need to be increased, not reduced. We are shocked that the other major parties not only seem to endorse government proposals but would take them further.

Resources are available to pay for the staff we need to ensure high quality public services do exist providing, firstly, spending priorities are radically altered from spending on war and secondly, tax cuts and benefits to big corporations and the very well off are reversed.

There is a need for flexibility to allow for local and regional variations, reflecting issues such as the varying cost of living and recruitment issues in different parts of the country.

There is, however, also the need for an overriding national pay framework similar to that in the NHS. The DWP reveals the dangers of a completely fragmented 'free for all'. The DWP is notorious as the worst paying department, with a high turnover of underpaid and demoralised staff as a result. Who benefits from that?

Plaid Cymru supports PCS's efforts to establish a national civil service pay framework. Greater pay coherence is vital to ensure staff are treated fairly and equally wherever they work. What is clear is that locally determined pay leads to significant variations across the nations and regions of the UK and endemic pay inequality.

Half a million UK workers are dealing with more than 200 pay bargaining units in spite of the fact that they all work for the same employer. This leads to a serious pay anomaly between people carrying out the same role in different government departments.

Respect supports PCS's campaign for a national pay structure in the civil service. We also believe the pursuit of a national pay structure should be combined with seeking to ensure better pay and conditions for many of the very low paid workers in the civil service.

Strong trade unions and greater fairness in pay and conditions are essential to ensure public services are appropriate for a rich and advanced industrialised country in the 21st century. We, therefore, also stand for the repeal of the anti-trade union legislation first introduced by the Tories and continued by New Labour.

Across the Western world people are living longer, healthier lives. Population demographics mean that over the next 30 years there will be fewer and fewer people of working age to support those drawing their pensions. Change has to come across the board.

A pension entitlement based upon average annual earnings will benefit many people compared to final salary schemes - especially, but not only, women whose working careers are more disjointed. Terms of employment cannot, however, be changed overnight and without negotiation, especially when low paid public sector workers have been told that they at least have a good pension as compensation.

Plaid Cymru has backed the campaign to prevent New Labour's plans to slash pension entitlements. We believe New Labour's plans will only exacerbate pensioner poverty.

Public sector workers will face a double hit under these proposals; increased contributions and reduced entitlements, with low paid workers hit the worst.

Everybody understands that pensions must remain affordable, however, the government must understand that it is the security of a good pension that entices many people into committing themselves to the public and voluntary sectors.

This is yet another example of New Labour lashing out at public sector workers.

Respect unequivocally opposes the government's proposal to raise the pension age. All the evidence shows that the longer people are obliged to work the earlier they die. We also believe ending the final salary scheme will cut many civil servants' pensions unfairly.

Billions of pounds could be made available to fund any pensions gap if the top rate of tax was raised and tax relief limited on pension contributions. We believe there should also be higher pensions for lower paid workers. We do not trust the government's intentions in relation to the untested whole career scheme.