

'If you can work, you should,' says minister – as benefits crackdown looms

There is a “duty on citizens” to work if they are able to, a government minister has said.

Chief secretary to the Treasury, Laura Trott, told Sky News the Conservatives believe “if you can work, as a principle, you should work”, saying the tenet is “the thrust of all our policies”.

Her remarks came ahead of the autumn statement on Wednesday, where the government is expected to announce plans to force those with mental health or mobility problems to find work they can do from home, or risk losing their welfare payments.

Government sources have told Sky News there is a concern a large number of people are currently “written off” and there will be measures in the speech to address that.

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Chancellor Jeremy Hunt is said to be [considering a big squeeze on benefits](#) in order to make savings for the public purse.

Over the weekend, he said ministers needed to “take difficult decisions to reform the welfare state”, and he has not ruled out a change in the way the government increases benefits – perhaps using October’s lower inflation figure of 4.6% for the rise, rather than September’s higher number of 6.7%.

Economists said this would equate to a £3bn spending cut, largely impacting households receiving means-tested or disability benefits.

Charities and opposition MPs have appealed to the government

not to make the move, saying it would hit the poorest hardest as the cost of living crisis continues to bite.

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Currently, around two million working age people are not employed – [something Rishi Sunak dubbed a “national scandal” on Monday](#), claiming it was “not sustainable for the country”.

Asked by Sky News’ Kay Burley if the reports around the welfare shake-up were “uncaring”, Ms Trott said: “I think that if you can work, as a principle, you should work, and that is what the government believes, that’s been the thrust of all of our policies.

“Of course, there should be support for people to help them into work or to help them with issues that they’re facing.

“But ultimately there is a duty on citizens that if they are able to go out to work, that’s what they should do.”

She added that the Department for Work and Pensions – where she was formally a minister was “working very hard to make sure our welfare system is supporting those who need support”.

But, she said: “Those who can work, can contribute, should contribute. And that is the principle that we must keep throughout all of this.”



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Shadow work and pensions secretary, Liz Kendall, told Sky News said she was a “big supporter of flexible working and working

from home”.

But she blamed the government’s lack of support for those with disabilities and mental health conditions for the number of those out of work.

Ms Kendall said: “It’s very interesting to see Rishi Sunak railing against the fact millions of people are out of work due to long-term sickness, saying it’s a scandal they’ve been written off. Well, who’s done that?”

The Labour MP added: “What those people want is access to the talking therapies they need to deal with anxiety and depression.

“They need adaptations at work or at home if they have a disability, and we are seeing huge waits for people to get adaptations – both at home and in the work place.

“We strongly believe in work. But the government has failed to achieve that and instead of railing against the problems that they themselves have created, we need to see a proper plan.”