



Public affairs with a difference...

Welfare, Work, Economy, Universities, jobs

Middle-class pensioners will lose benefits

Daily Telegraph, The Times

MIDDLE-CLASS pensioners could lose their free bus passes and winter fuel payments under plans being drawn up by the Labour Party.

Universally available benefits would be reviewed by an incoming Labour government in 2015 while pensioners may face tax rises to pay for reforms to elderly care, the party's senior MPs said.

The warnings suggest that whichever party is in power after the election is likely to consider cutting benefits for pensioners to save money.

Liam Byrne, the shadow work and pensions secretary, said the payments would be reviewed as part of a thorough audit of public spending which Labour plans to carry out if it forms the next government.

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Labour would review the "balance" between targeted and universal benefits in the welfare budget.

"Savings are going to have to be made," he said. "Savings will also be needed on welfare spending and our challenge is how we spend that money to support more people."

The winter fuel allowance amounts to up to £200 for pensioners, £300 for the over-80s, and combined with other universal benefits including free television licences and bus passes cost the Exchequer billions of pounds a year.

'Firsts' to be phased-out

The Daily Telegraph

STUDENTS starting degrees this month will be issued with a school-style report card on graduation alongside their traditional degree classification.

Universities have paved the way for the abolition of the 200-year-old classification system by unveiling plans to issue a detailed breakdown of their academic achievements, exam results, extra-curricular activities and work placements.

More than half of universities will issue the new Higher Education Achievement Report, with plans for others to adopt it in the future.

It comes amid claims that the 200-year-old classification system – awarded to more than 300,000 graduates a year – was "too blunt a tool" to mark student ability.

Critics have also warned that degrees have been undermined by "grade inflation" after a doubling in the number of students being awarded first-class honours. Last year, 53,215 students – one-in-six – finished courses with top degrees.

Teachers work to rule

The Daily Telegraphy

Thousands of teachers will stage a work-to-rule from today as part of an escalating dispute over cuts to pay and pensions. Members of the National Union of Teachers are being told to refuse to supervise pupils over lunchtime, cover for absent colleagues and invigilate exams.

They should also refuse to be observed by senior staff for more than three hours a year and provide parents with just one written report on their son or daughter.

Labour leadership disowned threat to OAP benefits

The Independent

The Labour leadership slapped down Liam Byrne, the shadow Work and Pensions Secretary last night who suggested that a Miliband government could target universal benefits such as the winter fuel allowance and free bus passes for pensioners.

But a senior source rapidly disowned the comments. He said: "You should be in no doubt as to our commitment to universal benefits. We believe it gives everyone a stake in the welfare state."

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