Part 1: Forward

The Scottish Observatory for Work and Health was born from the research which went into ‘Turning The Tap Off’, published in 2007 by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH). That report (available from the GCPH website) examined the stock, and on and off flows, of population in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) in Glasgow and the wider Scottish context. Its key findings were that Glasgow has a particular problem in terms of the absolute size of its IB claimant population and that this population represents a high proportion of the working age population (16.4% in 2005). However, the report also showed a reduction in IB stock claimants in Glasgow and the rest of Scotland between 2000 and 2005.

The significance of the levels of IB receipt in Glasgow and Scotland as a whole have been recognised both for their economic and health implications. Subsequently, a consortium of funders led by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health established The Scottish Observatory for Work and Health (SOWH), based at in Public Health and Health Policy at the University of Glasgow and led by Dr Ewan Macdonald. Benefiting from several members of the original Turning the Tap Off team, the SOWH has funding for 3 years and a remit to continue and develop monitoring, in as close to real time as possible, trends in IB stock population and in on and off flow. The SOWH is also tasked with expanding the observatory function and research to explore the intricacies of the journey onto and off IB, how these vary by age, sex and geographical location and ultimately to consider ‘what works’ in reducing the IB population. The SOWH is keen to develop a focus on who gets off IB and what happens to them, as well as understanding the routes onto IB. We have the advantage and challenge of operating at a time of economic upheaval and of great change in the management of benefit receipt for health reasons.

In our first year, we have focused on refining and enhancing our ability to monitor and assess changes in the stock IB population and in on and off flows on an annual basis. This has included analyses by sex and small age categories. We have expanded our geographical focus to include areas of interest to our funders. We have also been able, through receipt of specialised data from DWP, to examine reasons for IB receipt, destinations for those coming off IB and how these relate to each other. Unfortunately however, at the time of writing, these data are not cleared for publication and have been removed from this version of the report.

We hope the report is interesting and stimulating.

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