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***Does the pensions White Paper repeat the mistakes of the past?***

- *leading politicians and experts will debate at launch of challenging new book*

The government has an opportunity to deliver a fair, sustainable pensions system, but the white paper risks perpetuating a century-old cycle of complex and muddled reforms, argue the editors of a new book being launched tomorrow.

Sixty years after the National Insurance Act laid the foundations for Britain's state pension system, the Government is proposing reforms it claims will be "the biggest renewal of our pension system since the Beveridge reforms."

This claim is challenged in *Britain's pensions crisis: history and policy*, being launched on Wednesday, 18 October at an event organised by the British Academy and *History & Policy*. A panel debate at Portcullis House will bring together historians, policymakers and other experts to discuss: ***Does the pensions white paper repeat the mistakes of the past?***

Speakers will include: **Nick Timmins**, *Financial Times* (Chair), **James Purnell MP**, Minister for Pensions Reform, **Nigel Waterson MP**, Shadow Pensions Minister, **Professor John Hills FBA**, LSE and former Pensions Commissioner, **Professor Pat Thane FBA**, pensions historian, University of London and **Dr Ros Altmann**, independent pensions expert.

The editors of the book, three leading pensions historians, welcome some of the government's proposals, but criticise the failure to unravel what they describe as the "complex, ramshackle apparatus of the system built up over the past half-century".

They conclude that, "the white paper offers a hall of mirrors, giving an illusion of improvement that does not stand up to close examination and is highly unlikely to be sustained."

Other contributors include Frank Field MP, Professor John Hills, Baroness Hollis and leading academics from the U.K., Europe and the U.S.

**Dr Hugh Pemberton**, co-editor and Lecturer in Modern British History, University of Bristol, said:

“The Turner Reports have done future generations a service, creating a consensus that there is a pensions crisis and forcing the government to produce proposals to solve it. The pensions white paper proposes several reforms that I applaud, including the restoration of the earnings link, raising the pension age and recognising the need for a National Pensions Savings Scheme.

“But these are all incremental changes to the existing system. In no sense is this a ‘revolution’ or ‘another Beveridge’.”

**Professor Pat Thane FBA**, co-editor and Director of the Centre for Contemporary British History at the University of London, said:

“Twentieth-century governments missed opportunities to deliver lasting pensions reform about once every decade and today’s messy, iniquitous pensions system is a product of these successive policy failures. The current government faces a huge challenge if it is to buck this trend and create a system fit for the twenty-first century.

“The White Paper currently on offer will not deliver a universal state pension that is enough to live on. In particular, the ‘something for something’ approach the government claims to espouse still does not go far enough to give women a fair deal. The White Paper is a glimmer on the horizon, but not the new dawn we were promised.”

**Noel Whiteside**, co-editor and Professor of comparative public policy at the University of Warwick said:

“The white paper takes a small but insignificant step in the right direction. Sadly, the government has let slip the opportunity to follow the Turner report, to overhaul our complicated system and secure real reform. In other countries, notably Sweden, old systems have been modernised and public trust restored. Why good practice elsewhere is not given more serious attention is beyond comprehension.”

## Notes to editors:

1. For security reasons, it is essential to register in advance for the launch event. To attend, please contact James Rivington at the British Academy on 020 7969 5216 or email [pubs@britac.ac.uk](mailto:pubs@britac.ac.uk).
2. For interviews with the editors, please contact Mel Porter on 020 7862 8768, or email [mel.porter@sas.ac.uk](mailto:mel.porter@sas.ac.uk).
3. *Britain's pensions crisis: history and policy*, edited by Hugh Pemberton, Pat Thane and Noel Whiteside, is published by Oxford University Press for the British Academy (£14.99). The book is the product of a conference held at the British Academy in June 2005, which was generously sponsored by Zurich Financial Services (UK) and B & CE Benefit systems. For full details of the book, please see:  
<http://www.oup.com/uk/catalogue/?ci=9780197263853>
4. The launch event has been organised by the British Academy and *History & Policy*. Frank Field MP is kindly supporting the event, enabling it to be held at Portcullis House.
5. *History & Policy* is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history, see [www.historyandpolicy.org](http://www.historyandpolicy.org). Professor Pat Thane is a founding member.
6. The British Academy is the UK's National Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Established by Royal Charter in 1902, the British Academy is an independent learned society promoting the humanities and social sciences. It is composed of Fellows elected in recognition of their distinction as scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Further details about the British Academy may be found at:  
<http://www.britac.ac.uk>