

Public attitudes to poverty

*Scoping report prepared
for Engage Britain*

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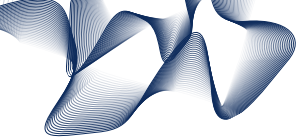
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Foreword

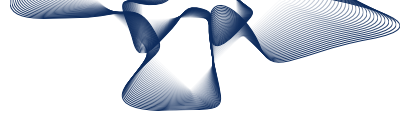
Julian McCrae, Director, Engage Britain

Opportunities for people living in poverty has been a long-term social concern – one that is only set to grow with the cost of living crisis making it harder for greater numbers of people to afford the basics and pushing more people into destitution.

We commissioned this report to better understand public attitudes to opportunities for people in poverty – a key challenge prioritised by the British public – and to identify a space in which Engage Britain can help to move the UK conversation forward through participatory approaches to policy development.

What the research shows is that you need to be careful when you use the term poverty, because it means different things to different people. For the public, the term “poverty” tends to invoke ideas of destitution. However, this clearly juxtaposes with the “policy wonk” use of term poverty, which captures a much broader group of people – around 14 million people. But that’s not to say that the public don’t care about the issues that policymakers have in mind when talking about poverty. It’s just that the term “poverty” doesn’t resonate with them in this context.

The public do care about wider groups than those in destitution and their opportunities, it’s just that they don’t necessarily interpret this as being in poverty. The risk, then, when you frame these discussions around poverty is that you miss what people really care about, which is ensuring that people having meaningful opportunities in their lives.



What's also clear from the research is that people bring stereotypes to conversations about poverty, particularly focused on benefits claimants. Falling back on stereotypes as a way into most policy debates is only natural, so their importance in top-of-mind discussions about poverty is not surprising.

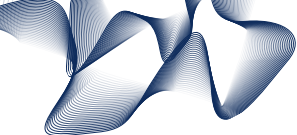
But the stereotypes of people living in poverty in the UK are notably more negative than in other parts of Europe. "Benefits cheat" narratives tend to focus on people not taking opportunities and never having contributed. This leads to two cycles of debate that generally end up going nowhere.

First, the temptation to base policies on building "out-groups". Often this has come from the right of the political spectrum, but policy cycles show this approach ultimately has to be abandoned: the public do fundamentally care about improving people's lives.

Second, the temptation to dismiss public perceptions of poverty as wrong – or even dangerous – in embodying prejudice through belief in negative stereotypes. This is often the temptation on the left, as any discussion seen as being about "deserving" or "underserving" groups as a way of creating out-groups is quickly dismissed.

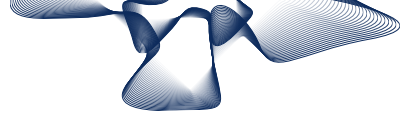
Both approaches tend to lead our society nowhere. Instead we should embrace the concepts of opportunity, contribution and control as potentially ways of binding together "in-groups".

Public appetite for support for people struggling in their lives tends to come back to dynamic factors of opportunity, contribution and control. The public want to support those who have been denied opportunities, but not those who they believe are not taking up opportunities. They want to support those who make pro-social contributions in their



lives (whether as monetary contributions to the system or as social contributions to their communities), but are not keen to offer support to those seen to have failed to contribute. And they want to see support for those affected by issues beyond their control, but lack support for those who they perceive to be deliberately placing themselves in difficult situations.

Our task is to renew our welfare structures in ways that encapsulate the positive sides of these views, rather than ignore them or exploit their negatives.



Executive Summary

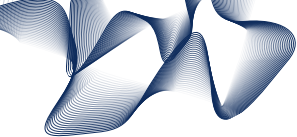
Addressing poverty is a perennial issue in British politics. Yet it is one that gained further salience in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and more recently with the emergence of the cost of living crisis.

Not only did the pandemic affect the jobs and earnings of large numbers of UK workers, but the government response encompassed major changes to the social security system. This includes the introduction of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (or “furlough” scheme), and the introduction, and subsequent removal, of the £20 per week uplift in universal credit – a move described by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as “the biggest overnight cut to the basic rate of social security since World War II” (Masters and Anderson, 2021).

In recent months, the cost of living crisis has prompted renewed attention on the rising number of households in the UK who are living in poverty, as increases in the cost of essential goods such as food, transport, housing and energy have led to a fall in disposable incomes (ONS, 2022a). These price increases are most acutely felt in low-income households, which spend a larger proportion than average on energy and food (Francis-Devine et al., 2022).

The number of households in poverty is also forecast to rise in the context of the cost of living crisis. The Resolution Foundation predicts that the number of people living in absolute poverty will rise from 11 million in 2021-22 to 14 million in 2023-24, with levels of child poverty returning to levels not seen since the 1990s (Corlett and Try, 2022).

A range of measures have been introduced by the UK Government throughout 2022 to help mitigate the impact of the crisis, including reductions to energy bills for all

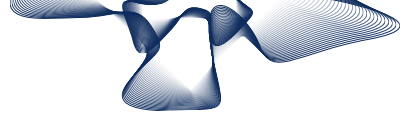


households, with additional support for households in receipt of means-tested benefits, pensioners and people receiving disability payments (Francis-Devine et al., 2022), as well as a rise in working age and disability benefits of 10.1 per cent to track inflation. But despite these measures, public concern about the crisis continues to rise. In November 2022, the ONS found that three in four (77 per cent) adults have been very or somewhat worried about the rising costs of living in the past two weeks, rising to 84 per cent in some of the most deprived areas in England (ONS, 2022c).

How the public thinks about the causes of poverty, their perceptions of the types of people affected and how they would like policymakers to respond are critical considerations in tackling these kinds of crises – as well as inequalities more generally. Taking account of public attitudes is clearly vital in ensuring that policy is responsive to some degree to the preferences of voters, and that actions taken have legitimacy in the eyes of those who pay for them through their taxes.

However, complicating this apparently straightforward relationship between public views and policy choices is the messier reality that there is no single “public view” of poverty and how to tackle it. At the most basic level, the public’s understandings of what poverty entails often differs markedly from definitions used by policymakers and experts.

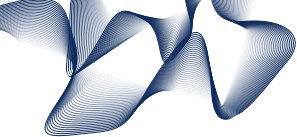
In this scoping study for Engage Britain, we assess the current state of knowledge around public attitudes to poverty in the UK. This involves drawing on both the existing literature and polling data, and consulting experts from academic and practitioner communities. Our aim is to address the following research questions, with the view to informing Engage Britain’s future work in this space, specifically in conducting deliberative work in this area:



1. What are the public's attitudes to poverty in the UK? What do they have in mind when they consider the term, and what forms of poverty, or groups affected, attract more or less concern, and why?
2. What approaches can best engage the public on poverty? How are different policy measures likely to be received, and are there measures that are likely to garner more consensus than others?

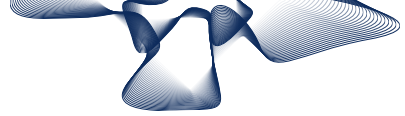
Public perceptions of and attitudes to poverty

- Official definitions of poverty – including the idea of “relative poverty” – often don't resonate with the public. The public tend to think of poverty as an individual's inability to meet their basic needs or the experience of destitution, rather than the inability to maintain a decent standard of living that most people take for granted.
- The public are concerned about people “struggling to get by” and experiencing economic insecurity, but don't necessarily view this as poverty. The term “in-work poverty”, in particular, has little resonance.
- The public's views on who deserves to claim welfare support (and at what level) vary across groups, though views are not fixed and do shift over time. Pensioners and people with disabilities tend to be seen as more deserving, while people who are out of work are viewed less favourably. Individuals in low-paid work and households on low incomes bringing up children sit somewhere in the middle.
- The perceived deservingness of the claimant group is associated with public perceptions of the reasons why members of that group ended up in poverty in the first place. For example, the unemployed are often



viewed as being in poverty because of poor choices or a lack of willingness to work hard, and on that basis are judged to be less deserving of help than those whose circumstances are not seen as being of their own making.

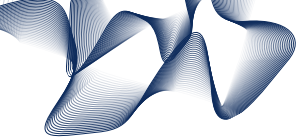
- ♦ The stereotype of unemployed people in Britain as being lazy or looking to game the system is relatively distinctive in international comparison, particularly setting British attitudes apart from those of their European neighbours.
- ♦ There is, of course, no one universally held set of attitudes when it comes to poverty. One line of division in how the public views poverty and what policies they would support to address it is between those who see outcomes, including poverty, as largely the result of individual efforts, and those who see outcomes as the result of social structures.
- ♦ Shifts in public attitudes to poverty are associated with political and media discourse, where certain groups of welfare recipients were demonised in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the period of austerity that followed. The “strivers versus scroungers” narrative was particularly powerful in shifting public perceptions towards seeing benefits claimants as “undeserving”.
- ♦ Since the 1980s, there has been a general “hardening” of attitudes towards people in poverty. However, this trend has started to reverse in the past decade, with increasing proportions of the public expressing concern about poverty levels and believing benefits should be increased.
- ♦ It is generally judged as being too soon to tell whether the experience of the Covid-19 pandemic and cost of living crisis will soften attitudes to poverty. But the indications from the pandemic suggest that any



increased generosity and concern initially prompted by the Covid-19 crisis may have been temporary.

Public appetite for action on poverty

- People are convinced of the need or societal duty to meet people's basic needs, such as food and housing. In some cases, the public afford equal weight to a wider set of opportunities beyond simply fulfilling basic needs, such as providing access to education.
- Judgements about whether an individual is deserving of support tend to hinge on whether they are seen to work hard. Providing more detail about the life circumstances of people who claim benefits can therefore help to counterbalance negative stereotypes, and open up more productive discussions about what forms of action would be most beneficial.
- The public have sympathy for people who are denied opportunities: while people are seen as being responsible for their own situations, the UK population tends to support action to benefit those who have been denied a fair chance of making a contribution to society.
- Reframing the discussion away from “poverty” can help to mobilise public support for action, circumventing the issue that the public and policymakers define poverty differently, and that conversations about poverty often quickly collapse into discussions of benefits claimants (particularly the unemployed).
- Focusing on the opportunities people need to live a decent life can help to talk constructively about the types of action people want to see on official measures of poverty. These include low pay and economic insecurity, access to affordable housing and good quality education. Work on minimum income standards has

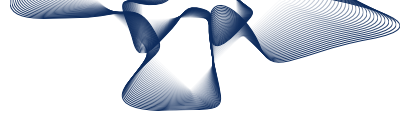


taken this approach, asking people to consider what a decent standard of living looks like, rather than what should be provided to those living in poverty specifically.

Policy debates into which deliberation can feed

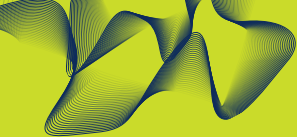
Conversations with practitioners and academics pointed to six broad policy areas that could be put to the public for consideration and debate:

1. Rethinking eligibility for state support and the generosity of support, including ideas of universal basic income and minimum income standards.
2. Reforming the benefits sanctions regime, while remaining aware of the importance of conditionality in the eyes of the public.
3. Moving from a welfare state focused on social protection to one focused on social investment, ie redirecting resources away from spending on social security and pensions towards spending on health, education etc.
4. Using localised approaches to tackle poverty and deprivation, including both national interventions delivered at the local level, and more bottom-up community solutions.
5. Rethinking the balance between labour market regulation and flexibility, recognising that the operation of the labour market is closely linked to many people's experiences of in-work poverty and insecurity.
6. Reducing poverty among people with disabilities, including moving away from an emphasis on



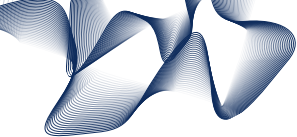
seeking to move members of this group into work, which is likely to be impossible for many.

People's broader worldviews – ie whether they see outcomes as the result of individual efforts (“Individualist”), or as being shaped by factors outside of a person's control (“Structuralist”) – are likely to shape how they view these different policy options, and whether they would be inclined to support them. Identifying policies that are able to bridge between those with different worldviews is particularly important from the perspective of attracting broad-based public support.



1 | Introduction





1 | Introduction

In a survey conducted by Engage Britain in September 2020, poverty (specifically “opportunities for families struggling to afford the basics”) was identified by the public as a key challenge facing the UK. And this issue becomes ever more salient as the cost of living crisis continues to play out.

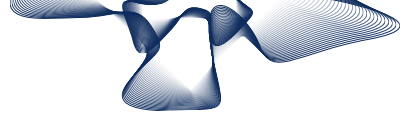
Due to the complexity of the area and significant amount of existing research on the topic, Engage Britain have commissioned this scoping report to identify a space in which to help move the UK policy conversation forward. The aim of this scoping study is therefore to address the following questions:

1. What are the public’s attitudes to poverty in the UK? What do they have in mind when they consider the term, and what forms of poverty, or groups affected, attract more or less concern, and why?
2. What approaches can best engage the public on poverty? How are different policy measures likely to be received, and are there measures that are likely to garner more consensus than others?

Approach

The following report is built around a rapid review of existing knowledge and areas for further exploration in a deliberative setting. This review was delivered through two strands of activity.

The first strand involved a literature review covering grey and academic literature as well as select sources of secondary attitudinal data. The questions that framed these searches of the literature were focused on: what motivates people when they prioritise poverty as an issue in the UK; what frames for



discussing poverty resonate with people; and how important is poverty to the public and is this changing?

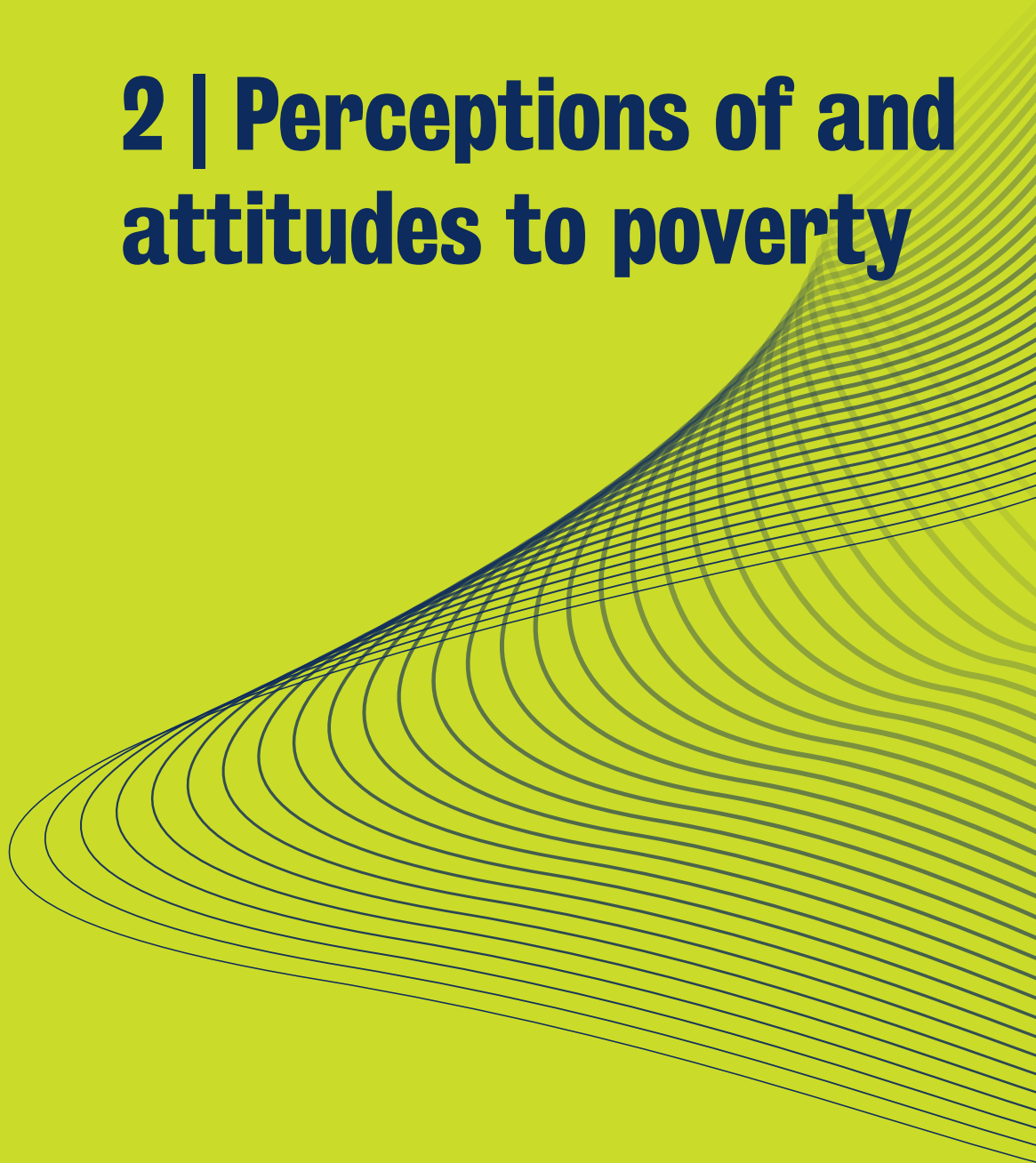
To contextualise these findings, we also consulted with experts and key stakeholders via semi-structured interviews. These interviews included 12 individuals whose expertise covers a wide range of issues related to poverty and who are active in the policy debate – including, but not limited to academics. The aim of these interviews was to get a holistic view of the challenges and priorities in the public’s attitudes to poverty, to ask targeted questions about the main policy trade-offs (i.e. drawing out “offers” and “asks” made to the public) and to identify policy debates into which deliberation could meaningfully feed.

Acknowledgements

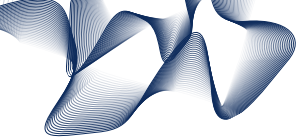
We are grateful to the following individuals and institutions for speaking to us as part of this research:

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- Centre for Regional Economic Social Research (CRESR), Sheffield Hallam University
- Christopher Deeming, Senior Lecturer, University of Strathclyde
- Fiona McHardy, Research and Information Manager, Poverty Alliance
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Matthew Oakley, Director, WPI Economics
- Paul Johnson, Director, Institute for Fiscal Studies
- Peter Taylor-Gooby, Research Professor of Social Policy, University of Kent
- Robert de Vries, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology, University of Kent

2 | Perceptions of and attitudes to poverty







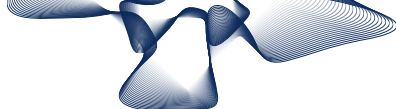
2 | Perceptions of and attitudes to poverty

The public tends to imagine “poverty” in a narrower sense than policymakers, focused on an inability to meet basic needs

What people mean when they talk about poverty is elusive. In her seminal book on poverty, Ruth Lister observes that there is “no single concept of poverty that stands outside history and culture”. Rather, poverty is a concept that is constructed differently in different societies and between different groups (Lister, 2004).

In the UK, the Government uses two poverty measures: an absolute measure which currently sets a threshold of 60 per cent of the median household income in 2010-11, and a relative threshold set at 60 per cent of the contemporary median household income. Households earning less than these thresholds are in absolute/relative poverty (Francis-Devine, 2021). Relative poverty captures more than material needs – ie whether people are able to afford the “normal” activities of their societies. While basic material needs may be relatively stable over time, societal changes and technological advances mean the expectations for “normal” living standards can change.

However, despite its use by officials, the idea of “relative” poverty generally doesn’t resonate well with the British public (Dunn, 2017). Instead, the public tend to imagine poverty as a set of harsher conditions based on basic need. While a large majority of people agree that not having enough to eat and live on without getting into debt would mean someone is in poverty, only half of the population would classify someone as being in poverty if they met these criteria but did not have enough “to buy other things they

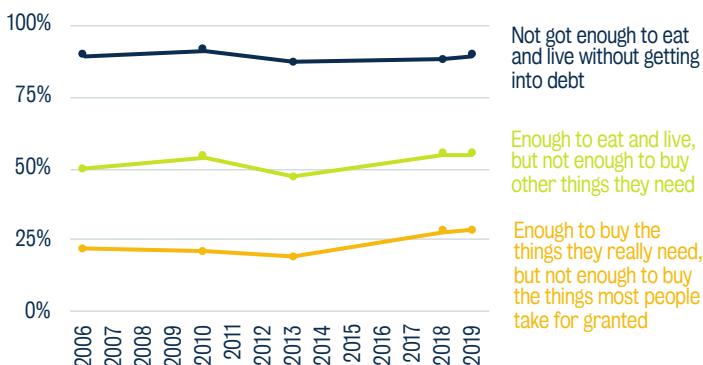


needed”. And just one in four would consider someone having “enough to buy the things they really need, but not enough to buy the things most people take for granted” as being in poverty – though there has been a slight rise in support for more inclusive definitions since 2013, as shown in Figure 1 (Clery & Dangerfield, 2019).

FIGURE 1: PUBLIC VIEWS OF WHAT POVERTY MEANS (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)

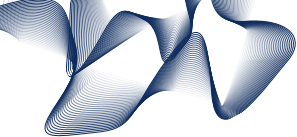
Would you say someone was or was not in poverty if they had...

% define as being “in poverty”



The gap between definitions of poverty adopted by policymakers and other experts, and the image of poverty held in the public imagination makes the question of connecting public concern about poverty to action taken in the policy domain challenging:

“It does worry me that the official definition of poverty that the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) uses is based on a definition that doesn’t chime with what people understand by it. It’s also such a big number that I think it’s easy to dismiss it and say, ‘Well, there can’t be 14 million people in poverty, if you mean anything sensible by poverty’, which may be true. But it may also be a lack of understanding of the level of the living standards this actually implies among those who are not on that level.” (Paul Johnson, consultation)



That said, the public do support a broader definition of poverty when elements of official definitions are broken down. For example, the Social Metrics Commission have tested new classifications of poverty through surveys conducted in the UK, in which there was clear support for measures of poverty that incorporate the cost of disability or childcare as well as the assets that someone holds in addition to their income. Incorporating these measures results in a profound shift in profile of those who are in poverty, with a “big shift ... towards working age families, families with larger numbers of children, and away from pension age households and significantly towards households that contain a disabled person. Under this measure, for instance, half of people in poverty are either disabled themselves or live with a person who is disabled.” (Matthew Oakley, consultation).

How poverty is defined and discussed is therefore an important consideration for research in this area, to reach a shared frame of reference between the public and policymakers:



Our perspective from the Fabian Society is that you should be talking about 14 million people in poverty. ... The fact that close to a quarter of people can't achieve the living standards that the country takes for granted, that is the critical social policy problem.”

– **Andrew Harrop,**
consultation

“When you are asking people what they think about poverty, implicit in it is their particular definition of it. That is what I find hard to unpick about public attitudes to poverty. ... Obviously you might care about some things, but not think they are poverty. ... Often, when people talk about poverty, what they're talking about is what we would probably call destitution. But they do have an understanding of things that we would call poverty and consider them to be a problem, but perhaps wouldn't attach the word 'poverty' to them.”
(JRF, consultation)

For example, concepts such as in-work poverty are less front-of-mind for people when asked to think about those in poverty, despite being viewed sympathetically. Studies



by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) have found the public is concerned with “people who are in work and can’t make ends meet, and the way in which, if you are constantly struggling, week to week, month to month, you don’t have any security and you can’t plan for the future and you can’t take steps to improve your lot.” Despite this finding, they cautioned that bluntly using the term “in-work poverty” isn’t an effective entry point into that conversation (JRF, consultation).

Attitudes to the welfare system vary by recipient group, but the UK public tends to be less sympathetic towards people on unemployment benefits

The UK public tends to hold different levels of sympathy towards different groups affected by poverty and how they are supported in the welfare system. Compared to attitudes to poverty and its causes, which tend to shift slowly, public preferences for who deserves welfare support and at what level are more volatile. In 2021, most consultees reported that there currently exists sympathy and concern for children living in poverty and for disabled people, but not for unemployed, single people of working age.

This distinction between groups seen as more or less deserving of support can be seen in Figure 2. In recent years, people with disabilities and pensioners have consistently been seen as more deserving of support from the welfare state, with about 50 per cent of respondents (sometimes more) saying these groups deserve more support than they currently receive, compared to consistently less than 40 per cent saying the same about people who are out of work, dropping to just 31 per cent in the last wave of data collection in September 2022.

Public appetite for increased support for individuals in low-paid work and households on low incomes bringing up children sits somewhere in the middle, though concern about the sufficiency of support for both groups has gradually risen in recent months to a similar level as those

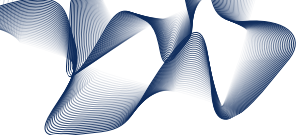
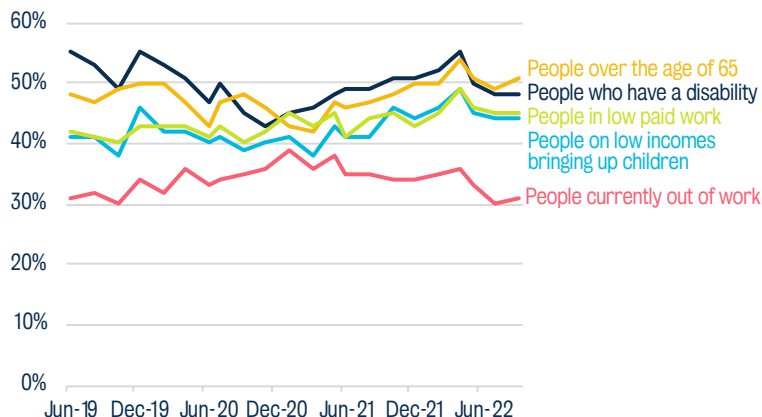


FIGURE 2: BELIEFS ABOUT WHO NEEDS MORE SUPPORT FROM THE STATE (YUOGOV WELFARE TRACKER)

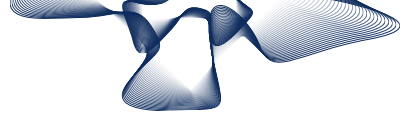
Thinking about the different groups who the benefit system supports, for each of the following groups do you think it offers too much support, too little support, or about the right amount?

% saying "too little support"



with a disability or over the age of 65. In particular, the proportion of people who believe there is insufficient support for low-income families with children has seen a steady increase over the past 18 months, and it seems likely that this trajectory will continue into 2022 as child poverty becomes an increasing focus in the cost of living crisis.

The volatility of public support for different groups who are supported by the welfare state is also reflected in public preferences for the level of support each group should receive. For example, while spending more on carers, the disabled and the elderly has consistently been more popular than spending more on unemployed people, there has been variation in support over time. Figure 3 shows those supporting income transfers to people with disabilities steadily declined from 1998 to 2011, and then reversed back to near start-of-trend levels. In contrast, support for income transfers to retirees was consistently around 70 per cent from 1998-2008, and has declined steadily since. The proportion opposed to transfers to the unemployed grew until 2008 and then has declined since.

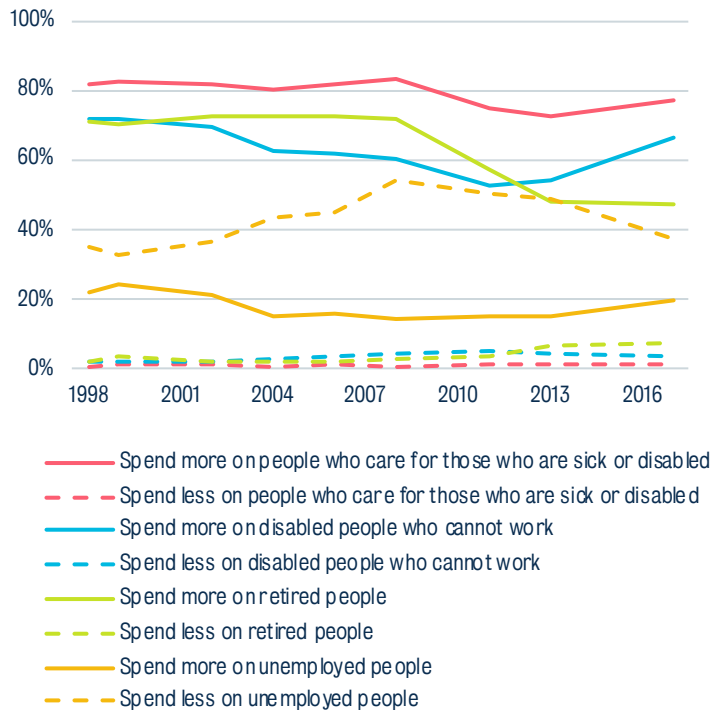


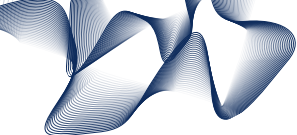
The UK is distinctive in some of these trends, particularly the disproportionately negative view of people who receive unemployment benefits. Negative stereotypes about benefits claimants are dominant in the UK public's frame of reference on poverty, resting on an "automatically activated, implicit, stereotyped idea of what a poor person is and what a benefit claimant is" (Robert de Vries, consultation).

Commonly held stereotypes include believing that those on benefits actively avoid work or look to game or manipulate the system (Inglis et al., 2019), despite only 3 per cent of benefit spending being fraudulent in the most recent year for which data is available, which happened to be a record high

FIGURE 3: PREFERENCES FOR INCREASING OR DECREASING SPEND ON SOCIAL SECURITY, BY GROUP (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)

Some people think that there should be more government spending on social security, while other people disagree. For each of the groups I read out please say whether you would like to see more or less government spending on them than now.

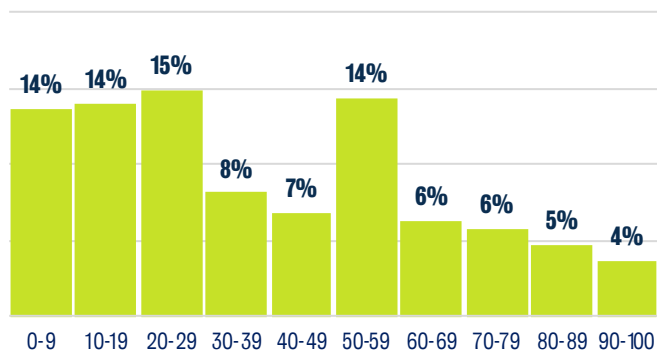




year (DWP, 2021a). For example, the 2019 British Attitudes Survey found that a majority of people in Britain (54 per cent) believe the government is not doing enough to reduce benefit fraud. However, this is based on a misperception that a significantly larger proportion of benefits claimants are giving false information to support their claim – with 86 per cent of the public believing that the true values lies above the 3 per cent estimate of fraudulent benefits claims from the Department for Work and Pensions.

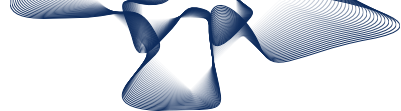
FIGURE 4: PERCEPTIONS OF THE PREVALENCE OF BENEFITS FRAUD IN 2019 (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)

Out of every 100 people receiving benefits in Britain, how many have broken the law by giving false information to support their claim?



The large discrepancy between paradigms of perceived behaviours of benefits claimants with actual levels of fraud suggests anomalies and anecdote have given rise to negative misperceptions of benefits claimants. Reflecting on democratic forums conducted across five European countries on the welfare state, Peter Taylor-Gooby similarly noted:

“These issues of stigma and opportunity came up in the UK ... and it is very, very distinctive. You do get stigmatisation, of course, in other European countries, in southern European countries and so on, but nothing like as strong, and almost uniform across pretty much



everybody in the forum. We had 30 or 40 people and only a few people spoke against it and tended then just to go quiet, because they had no support at all from others.” (Peter Taylor-Gooby, consultation)

This tendency to fall back on a particular stereotype of people on unemployment benefits was also observed among practitioners and policymakers by one consultee:

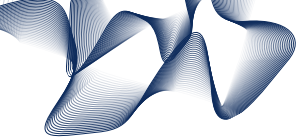
“It’s quite interesting when you see a professional audience come back with the same examples or stories [as the general public]. Because every person who works in a Jobcentre, every person who works in a council, every person who works in a school... will quite easily come up with an example of the person who is the one who is the extreme. They don’t often come up with the example of the one where it’s, ‘Oh, she works two jobs, but she can’t afford to pay the rent because she lives in London,’ or, ‘She’s in a flat with her three kids, in a one-bedroom flat, and she sleeps in the front room because with Local Housing Allowance, that’s the only rent she can afford.’ ... They’ll still come forward with the characterisation of the one that shows a bad light on the system rather than good.” (CRESR consultation)



People focus on the disabled person who is fiddling it, and they don’t focus on other disabled people, who surely must be at least as well-known in the community, who certainly aren’t fiddling it, and who are having a very tough time, obviously.”
– **Peter Taylor-Gooby, consultation**

However, stigmatisation of groups in receipt of benefits has varied over time. At the start of austerity in the early 2010s, a qualitative study conducted in areas of Bristol with high levels of social deprivation found that specific groups were repeatedly singled out as receiving unfairly high levels of support, including ex-offenders, single mothers, people with disabilities or particular ethnic groups (Hoggett et al., 2013).

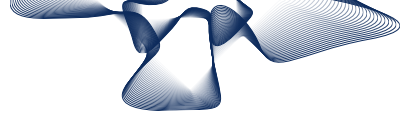
More recent research suggests that the dial has turned for some of these groups. Reflecting on a citizens’ jury on potential reforms to social security, one consultee found that attitudes had warmed towards other groups, such as single parents and those with disabilities and their carers, even though sympathy for unemployed people remained low:



“There was really strong support for anyone who was in work, and carers and disabled people. ... Interestingly, there was also quite strong support for lone parents, whereas if you’d done this 20 or 30 years ago, there would have been strong stigma. ... [In our research] there was a clear distinction between parents looking after young children, which was seen as an important contribution, compared to once they get older, where there was a clear expectation that you should be working. But there are still really, really surprisingly high levels of suspicion of unemployed people. We were doing this fieldwork at the height of the pandemic, in the middle of the second wave, and yet still you had people saying unemployed people were out of work because of their own moral failure, rather than something systemic. That was in the context of millions of people not being able to work. ... Attitudes to unemployment are better now than they were 10 years ago, but it’s still surprising just how many people have negative attitudes to someone who is unemployed.”
(Andrew Harrop, consultation)

The dominance of negative stereotypes around people on unemployment benefits is also associated with what people think of when they hear the term “welfare”. While around four in five people would consider unemployment benefits as welfare, other forms of state support such as tax credits and pensions resonate far less as forms of welfare, even though they account for more spending (Stanley & Hartman, 2016).

Several studies find that stereotypes of benefit recipients are held among benefit recipients themselves (see, for example, Fletcher et al., 2016), though some studies find that this group tend to see stereotypes of benefit recipients as applying more in the abstract rather than reflecting their own lives and experiences, or those of people they know (Pemberton et al., 2016). In consultation, Matthew Oakley, Director of WPI Economics, noted how benefits claimants



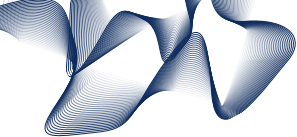
can be “some of the harshest in that they will be very, very critical of people that they see as ripping them off, ripping off the state, not doing what they should be doing. They see themselves as doing all the right things and are both hurt by being tarred with the same brush but also very against those people they see not to be doing what they should be doing” (Matthew Oakley, consultation).

How we rationalise the causes of poverty reinforces less sympathetic stereotypes

The basis of negative stereotypes of welfare recipients, specifically those on unemployment benefits, tend to focus on causes such as avoiding work, being lazy or looking to unfairly profit from the system. Such beliefs about the causes of poverty build on implicit ways in which our values and worldviews shape how we think about a wide range of issues.

Two ways in which worldviews have been found to influence how we rationalise the causes of poverty can be described as follows: on the one hand, that systematic features of social arrangements create and perpetuate inequalities (the “Structuralist” view); and, on the other, that inequalities in outcomes are determined entirely by individual efforts (the “Individualist” view), such as hard work or talent (Benson et al., 2021a).

Individual characteristics, such as earning higher incomes or having a stronger sense of autonomy or locus of control, have been found to predict favouring individualistic over structural explanations (Smith, 1985, 2010; Aldama et al., 2021), as have country-level characteristics such as welfare regimes and economic context (Kallio & Niemelä, 2014; Lepianka et al., 2010). Yet the strength of Individualist or Structuralist belief also varies between contexts, be it in relation to different issues, situational or personal contexts, or as a result of cognitive biases (for a summary of the literature, see Benson et al., 2021a).



As part of the Deaton Review of Inequalities in the 21st Century, Benson et al. (2021a) explore how people perceive and rationalise the causes of a range of inequality types. Through a survey covering a range of inequality types, they identify three groups among the UK population with distinct sets of attitudes – the Structuralists, the Individualists and those ‘In the Middle’, each of which roughly accounted for a third of the population.

When it comes to what it takes to get ahead, all groups share a belief in the importance of rewarding hard work; however, Structuralists are more likely to recognise factors outside the individual’s control (eg coming from a wealthy family), and to describe UK society as unequal. Individualists, on the other hand, are eager to see the world as fair. They dismiss the influence of coming from a wealthy family, or a particular race and religion in getting ahead, and generally do not consider factors beyond the individual’s control to be important (Benson et al., 2021a).

Benson et al. also find that Individualist and Structuralist worldviews are associated with what people perceive to be the causes of unequal outcomes, as well as their support for policies that seek to balance these disparities. For example, there are substantial differences in views of benefit adequacy by inequality world view. 57 per cent of Structuralists believe unemployment benefit levels are too low, while Individualists are most likely to believe that benefit levels are too high and disincentive job searching (38 per cent) (see Figure 5). Similarly, while a majority of people take a meritocratic view of reasons for job loss during the pandemic, Structuralists are more likely than other groups to believe luck to be important, and slightly less likely to attribute job loss to personal performance (see Figure 6).

Individualistic beliefs about the causes of poverty were also prominent in deliberative forums conducted in Birmingham in 2015 to examine attitudes to welfare futures in the UK



FIGURE 5: BELIEFS ABOUT OUTCOMES OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS, BY WORLDVIEW (BENSON ET AL., 2021)

Opinions differ about the level of benefits for unemployed people. Which of these two statements comes closest to your own view?

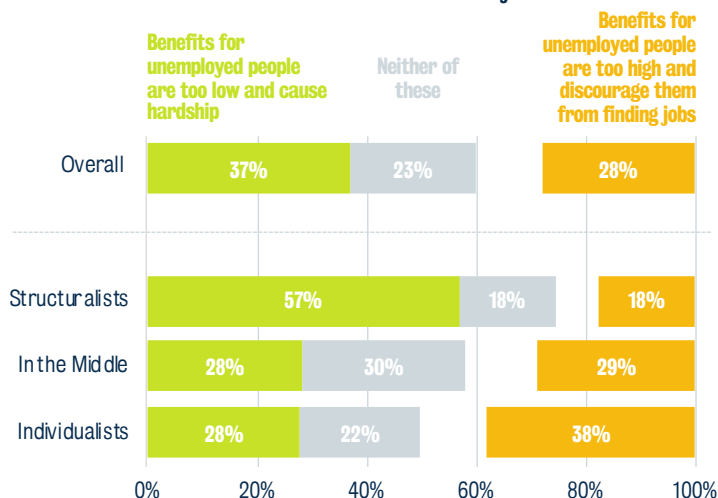
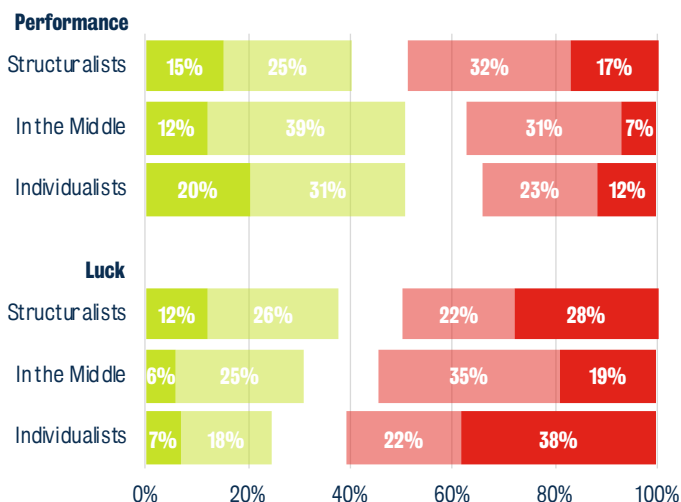
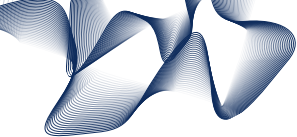


FIGURE 6: BELIEFS ABOUT THE CAUSES OF JOB LOSS IN THE PANDEMIC, BY WORLDVIEW (BENSON ET AL., 2021)

Some people have already lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, and others are likely to in the coming months. How important do you think [...] is in determining whether people lose their jobs at this time?

■ Very important ■ Fairly important ■ Not very important ■ Not important at all





(Taylor-Gooby et al., 2019). Belief in the importance of work ethic and individual responsibility were salient for participants, as were beliefs about benefits abuse by unemployed people – which, in some cases, strengthened through the process of deliberation. However, the authors also note that belief in individualistic causes were one of a complex set of priorities about the welfare state, among which are enthusiasm for healthcare and pensions as well as support for expansion of the welfare state to people who “make the effort”.

Drawing on fieldwork conducted in the US in summer 2020, one consultee reflected on how Individualism has remained a prominent worldview during the coronavirus pandemic, with personal merit explanations for job losses remaining persistent in how people rationalised the causes of poverty:

“We were not quite locked down, but there was a lot of limitation on people’s activities, people were losing jobs left and right. When we asked about different things and what was going on, people would acknowledge that people were losing their jobs for reasons that have nothing to do with their own actions. Then they’d quickly pivot to say things like, ‘Ultimately, it’s up to each of us to figure out what to do about it. You have to be resourceful and figure out what the next opportunity might be.’ People would quickly move from ‘There’s context that’s shaping people’s lives and that’s totally out of their control’, to focusing on the choices that people are making as the thing that’s responsible for where they’re going to end up.” (Andrew Volmert, consultation)

Changes in public attitudes to poverty follow shifts in policy, media and political discourse

In the years after the onset of the 2008 recession, there was a well-evidenced trend in media and political discourse of othering particular groups of people in poverty, specifically



The Work Programme tended to demonise welfare and things like that, really. On the whole, it was quite tough on it. ... So it's probably not surprising that we see the lowest levels of support for welfare systems in Britain are during these periods where there's been an attack on welfare." – **Christopher Deeming, consultation**

the unemployed. Okoroji et al. (2021) found that “othering frames” were prevalent both in speeches by the Labour and Conservative party leaders, and in UK newspapers, where use of othering frames increased by 2.7 per cent each year, peaking in 2013.

The use of these frames in newspapers, which Okoroji et al. define as portraying the unemployed as “intrinsically different, and subordinate to, the ‘average’ British citizen”, rose sharply during financial crisis and peaked in 2013 with the announcement of Universal Credit. But by 2016, they had dropped to the lowest level since the start of the trend. Okoroji et al. (2021) find that this peak is consistently and significantly associated with negative attitudes towards unemployed people and public preferences for spending on welfare benefits – even after controlling for the effect of the unemployment rate. Reeves & de Vries (2016) similarly find that readers of newspapers, regardless of whether they read a right- or left-leaning title, were more likely to express negative attitudes to welfare recipients following sustained media emphasis on the urban poor (and by extension, welfare recipients) during the 2011 riots that erupted after the shooting of Mark Duggan by police.

Of course, it isn't possible to say in which direction causality runs – whether media and political frames shape public attitudes or vice versa, or both. However, there does appear to be an association between them. Since the use of othering frames diminished in public discourse in 2013, we see a softening of attitudes to welfare benefits. As shown in Figure 7, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of people who say that cutting welfare benefits would damage too many people's lives, along with a decline in the belief that unemployment benefits are too high and discourage people from finding jobs.

There are also many other factors that feed into how attitudes to poverty form. In consultations, for example, interviewees observed a link between the harshness of public

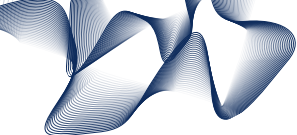
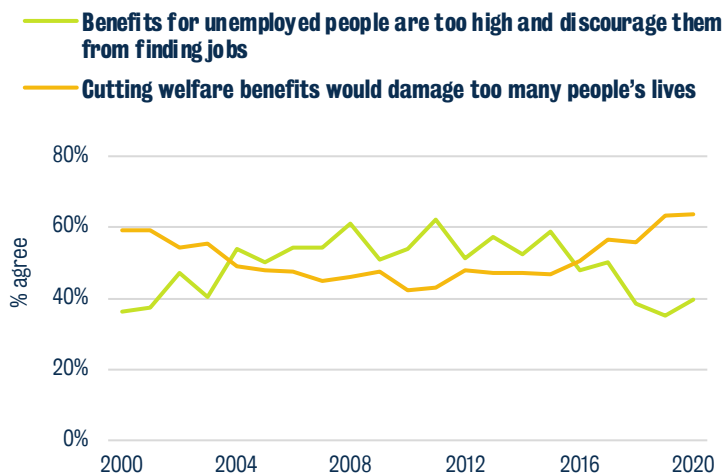


FIGURE 7: BELIEFS ABOUT ACCEPTABLE WELFARE LEVELS (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)



sentiment towards benefits claimants and policy, political discourse (particularly the rhetoric of “strivers versus scroungers” during austerity), and the wider policy and economic context, such as levels of unemployment:

“There’s this kind of thermostatic effect, which is that as the policy gets harsher and harsher, you start to see more and more stories about the victims of that policy. ... You saw that in the decade from the end of the financial crisis. ... The proportion of people saying that half, or less of claimants are genuinely in need and deserve it has fallen by 10-15 percentage points.”
(Robert de Vries, consultation)

Levels of concern about poverty are increasing, but it is not clear that crises such as COVID-19 have caused a longer-term softening of attitudes towards the deservingness of benefits claimants

The coronavirus pandemic hit at a time when attitudes to poverty had already begun to grow more sympathetic. This followed on the heels of a general “hardening” of attitudes towards people in poverty since the 1980s. However, since the early 2010s, British Social Attitudes (BSA) data shows

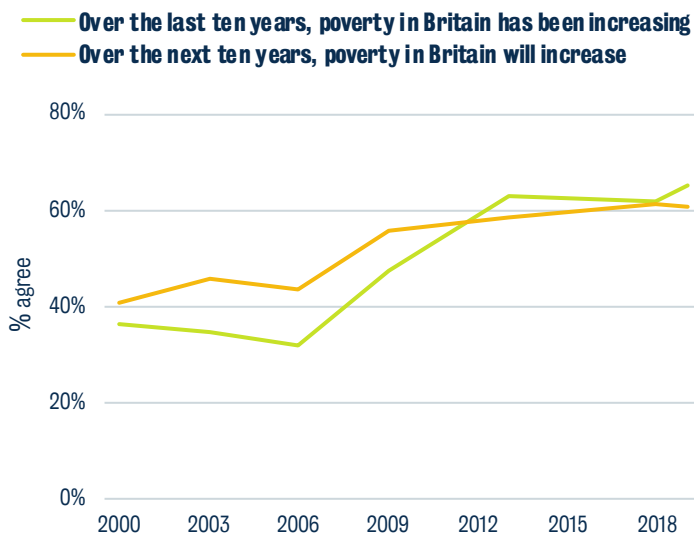


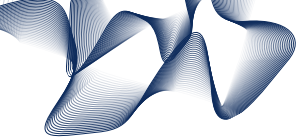
a sharp increase in the proportion of people saying that poverty levels have increased over the last 10 years, and who believe they will increase further still over the next decade (see Figure 8). And there are other signs of a softening of attitudes too. In 2019, almost two thirds (63 per cent) of people in Britain thought cutting benefits would damage too many people's lives – the highest figure since 2001.

While many have hypothesised that the COVID-19 pandemic will transform attitudes to poverty, particularly due to greater exposure to the welfare system (de Vries et al., 2021), in 2021 many consultees emphasised that it was too soon to observe whether the pandemic had, in fact, accelerated this softening of attitudes to poverty.

Some aspects of the pandemic – particularly in raising the visibility of low paid, insecure work, and the value of those roles to our society – did initially shift the conversation, and coincided with an observable period of national solidarity

FIGURE 8: PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGING POVERTY LEVELS IN BRITAIN (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)





to support those most in need (as seen, for example, in an increase in generosity to food banks as well as the proportion of people saying they would be willing to pay more tax to support stronger benefits and a more equal society) (Peter Taylor-Gooby, consultation). However, this effect on attitudes had already begun to recede by 2021, as these arguments became less visible in public discourse.

The coming months will reveal if this pro-welfare discourse resumes prominence in the context of the cost of living crisis. However, the dominant message in consultations (which took place before the onset of the cost of living crisis) was to exercise caution in estimating the longevity of moments of crisis in shifting the public's disposition towards poverty. Rather, the softening of attitudes to poverty during the pandemic is more meaningfully understood in the context of a longer-term growth in concern about poverty levels and a softening of attitudes towards the deservingness of benefits claimants, both of which pre-date the pandemic:

“We were getting to the point, 10 years ago, where people were of the view that, actually, a child living in poverty, well, that’s just bad luck, and it’s the parents’ fault. ... Whereas now, there has been a shift back to thinking, actually, a child growing up in poverty is a problem that we all share and the government has some responsibility to address. So, I think what the pandemic does is potentially seal and accelerate a little bit some of those shifts that we were already seeing. So, I think the pandemic is really important as a moment, but it’s not the whole story. The whole story is much longer, and it goes back further.” (JRF, consultation)

This is clearly born out in trend data since the beginning of the pandemic. The Ipsos MORI Issues Index asks Britons what they consider to be the most important issues facing the country today, tracking responses over time. Over the course of the pandemic, the proportion of respondents

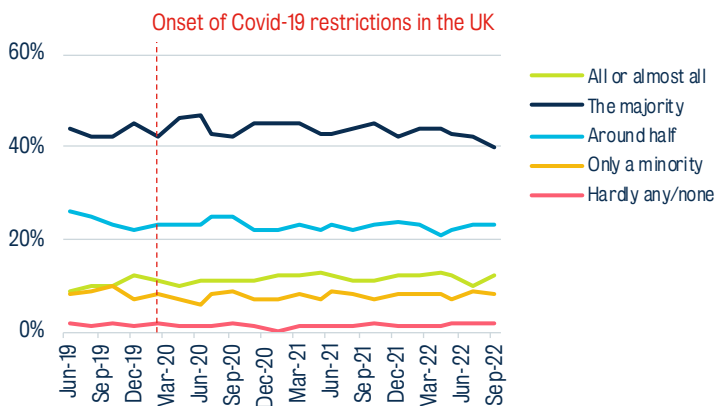


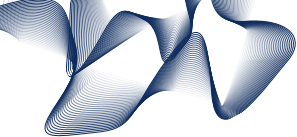
who mentioned poverty or inequality as one of the most important issues facing Britain did not actually increase. The proportion of people mentioning poverty or inequality has remained similar in recent months as in the six months preceding the pandemic, consistently ranking at around 5th or 6th in the index over the course the pandemic, showing little change from pre-pandemic levels – though issues relating to the cost of living crisis, such as the economy and inflation have topped the list of issues (Ipsos, 2022).

Similarly, ideas about the relative deservingness of benefits recipients have remained relatively stable over the course of the pandemic. Since the onset of Covid-19 restrictions in the UK, the proportion of the public who say that people receiving benefits are genuinely in need and deserving of help has remained relatively stable, continuing along a comparable path to that seen prior to the pandemic (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: BELIEFS ABOUT THE DESERVINGNESS OF WELFARE RECIPIENTS (YUGOV WELFARE TRACKERS)

Thinking about people who receive welfare benefits, including disability benefits, out of work benefits and benefits to support people in low paying work, what proportion of people receiving benefits do you think are genuinely in need and deserving of help?



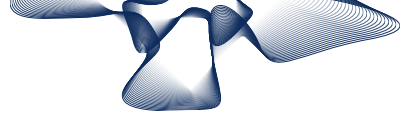


The question of why public attitudes to benefits did not soften more as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic has been investigated by the Welfare at a Social Distance project. Through a dedicated survey, this project explored the concept of “COVID exceptionalism” – the idea that those who began claiming welfare during the pandemic may be viewed differently to pre-pandemic claimants. They found that respondents were more likely to see COVID claimants as deserving, and less likely to view them as having some responsibility for their situation, compared to pre-pandemic claimants (while stressing that pre-pandemic claimants were still viewed relatively sympathetically by the public – just less so than COVID claimants). The authors argue that general welfare attitudes tend to be reflective of ideas about pre-pandemic claimants, rather than the new group of COVID claimants (see de Vries et al., 2021).

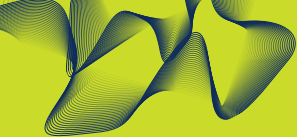
Andrew Harrop from the Fabian Society similarly observed that it is the facts and frame of reference around poverty that have changed during the pandemic, rather than attitudes or values intrinsically. Observing this dynamic in citizens’ juries conducted during the pandemic, Harrop noted:

“The best examples are the Universal Credit uplift and the furlough scheme. Both of them moved goal posts and got people to engage in other ways. With the Universal Credit uplift, it’s classic ‘loss aversion’, where people are more hostile to something being taken away than positive about something being introduced in the first place. But it goes further. If the Government thought the system needed an extra £20 a week to be adequate for people falling out of work during the pandemic, well that suggests there was something pretty badly wrong with the system already.

And then with furlough, it just made sense [to people] that you get a share of your earnings if you’re unable to work, rather than everyone getting a flat rate. Some members of the citizens jury, quite surprisingly, were

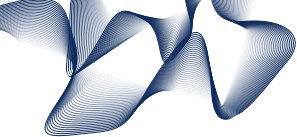


aware of other countries having similar earnings-based systems, and mentioned that spontaneously before we talked to them about it. And the group really strongly supported earnings replacement unemployment insurance. That's a direct effect of furlough being introduced. I'm sure you'd have never heard a group push for that, if it hadn't had an existing model to think about." (Andrew Harrop, consultation)



3 | Public appetite for action on poverty





3 | Public appetite for action on poverty

Public appetite for action on poverty can sometimes appear ambivalent, but there is support for action to give opportunities to those denied them and who are affected by forces beyond their control

In Britain, there is a general disconnect between concern about poverty and inequalities, and support for action to support those who are less well off. Data from the British Social Attitudes survey shows that the belief that income differences are too high has consistently and significantly outstripped public support for redistribution. As shown in Figure 10, since 1983, around four in five people have agreed that the gap between those with high incomes and those with low incomes is too large; however, support for government to redistribute incomes from the better-off to those who are less well-off has, on average, fluctuated at around half this proportion, settling at 46 per cent in 2020.

FIGURE 10: CONCERN ABOUT INCOME GAPS VS SUPPORT TO ADDRESS THEM (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)

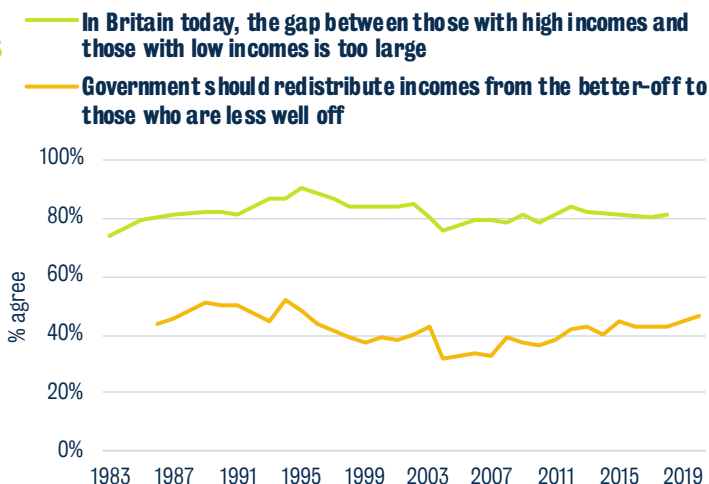
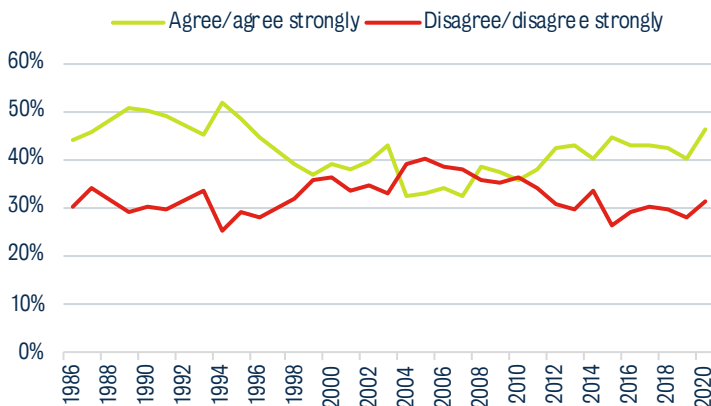




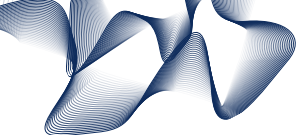
FIGURE 11: SUPPORT FOR REDISTRIBUTION TO ADDRESS INCOME INEQUALITY (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)

For each statement, say how much you agree or disagree with it: government should redistribute income from the better-off to those who are less well off.



The gap between public concern about inequality or poverty, and forms of action that could be taken to address them makes it complicated to assess public support for the methods by which the government might want to act on reducing poverty. For example, questions about support for greater redistribution can be particularly divisive. While there is general consensus around the nation's discomfort with large income disparities, there have consistently been large groups that are both supportive of and opposed to redistribution. As shown in Figure 11, between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, and since about 2012, support for redistribution was somewhat higher than opposition, although support has not yet regained the same level as at the start of the trend; yet between 1999 and 2010, support for and opposition to redistribution were at similar levels.

However, larger majorities supported forms of redistribution during the pandemic. For example, in a poll by Ipsos and the Health Foundation in 2020, 74 per cent of respondents supported the uplift in Universal Credit, and 59 per cent supported making this increase permanent, even after the pandemic (Ipsos MORI, 2020). Moreover, strong majorities were supportive of the furlough scheme and saw it as essential to protecting livelihoods (Duffy et al., 2021a).



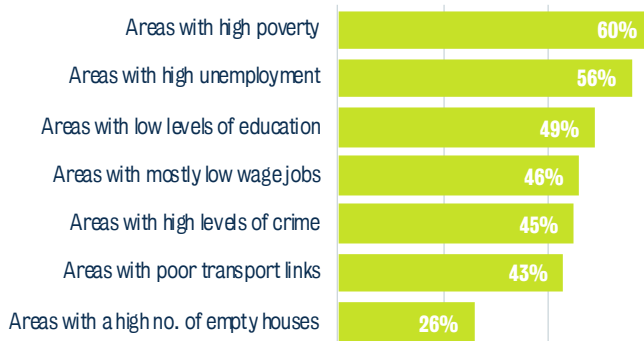
It is also clear, more generally, that action on poverty is seen as a priority area for the public when it comes to spending planned as part of the government's levelling up agenda (YouGov, 2021c). In a survey conducted by YouGov in December 2021, three in five people in Britain said that areas with high poverty should be prioritised for "levelling up" spending – surpassing linked, but distinct priorities such as increasing spend in areas with high unemployment (56 per cent), low levels of education (49 per cent) and with a high density of low wage jobs (46 per cent) (see Figure 12).

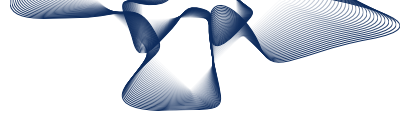
Some consultees also specifically observed that a fresh set of conversations around welfare are timely, "tapping into what's happening post-pandemic with the fact that there has been a slight shift in not just the rhetoric, but the job retention scheme and the level of support available, the less harsh sanctions, and the fact that there has been a doubling of Universal Credit claims of all sorts of people" (CRESR consultation). And as the cost of living crisis becomes an increasing worry for people in the UK (Hewlett, Hall et al., 2022; ONS 2022a) and pushes more households into poverty, these types of considerations once again prompt renewed calls for thinking afresh about how the state can best support people in poverty, amidst significant

FIGURE 12: PRIORITIES FOR LEVELLING UP SPENDING (YUGOV 2021C)

When deciding which areas to prioritise for "levelling up" spending, which of the following do you think the Government should prioritise?

Please tick all that apply



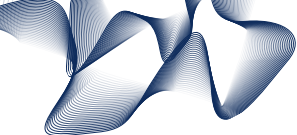


commitments to support households with the rising cost of energy and to raise the level of state pension and benefits in line with inflation.

“There is a sort of pendulum effect. I feel that the public aren’t stupid, there is a reaction to what the government of the day does and what is going on in society. And at a deeper level, that is reflected [in public attitudes]. I definitely feel we are in a moment where it is not hard to mobilise arguments around these kinds of injustices, whether at the toughest end or at that slightly broader security opportunity end. We don’t live in an era where public attitudes towards those issues are very hostile. ... We’re also not in a world where it is politically easy to make arguments about the feckless and the bloated state and all of that, for very factual reasons.” (JRF, consultation)

In general, there is strong support for action on poverty when it comes to meeting extreme forms of need, both among experts and the public, who tend to agree on the societal duty “to provide for people’s basic needs”, such as food and housing (Vollmert et al., 2016). In survey data we see this in, for example, the majority (57 per cent) who agree schools should provide free school meals even outside of term time, compared to just three in ten (29 per cent) who do not support this (YouGov 2020); or in the 51 per cent of people in Britain who say that food banks are an embarrassment to this country, with 55 per cent of people attributing the responsibility to address hunger in the UK to the government (Trussell Trust, 2019).

Similarly, there is clear public discomfort when it comes to lack of access to housing. A survey run by Ipsos for the Centre for Homelessness Impact in late 2020 found that 86 per cent of people in the UK consider homelessness to be a serious problem, particularly within cities (Marshall & Day 2021). The study also found strong public support for a wide range of policy interventions to address homelessness,



including creating a legal right to shelter (73 per cent support), offering greater security to people experiencing homelessness by supporting them to move into their own flats rather than offering temporary solutions like hostels or B&Bs (70 per cent support), or increasing housing-related benefits to help those who need it to afford somewhere to live (66 per cent).

The responsibility for taking action on housing, again, is typically felt to reside with the government. Around three quarters of the UK public (74 per cent) consider that the responsibility to guarantee that everyone has the right to access decent and affordable housing lies with the government (Marshall & Day, 2021). Belief in the government's responsibility for providing "decent housing for those who can't afford it" is also consistent over time, with trend data from the British Social Attitudes survey showing that a majority of the public have held this view for nearly three decades, though falling by 9 per centage points between 1990 (90 per cent) and 2016 (81 per cent) (see Figure 13).

This reflects a broader public belief that it is the central government who should be responsible for reducing poverty in Britain. In the 2019 British Social Attitudes survey, nine in ten respondents (90 per cent) agreed that reducing poverty should be the government's role, compared to just under two thirds, who thought it should be dealt with at local government level (62 per cent). Far fewer believed that actors beyond the state had a responsibility to reduce poverty, such as employers (42 per cent), businesses (34 per cent), charities (19 per cent) or churches/faith organisations (14 per cent). And only small minorities believed that people in poverty themselves (25 per cent), or their friends and relatives (16 per cent), had a role to play.



Destitution, which I do think there is very, very broad public moral concern about, probably has been much more visible in recent years." – **JRF, consultation**

Yet consistent with findings in Section 2, even when it comes to basic needs, preferences for state intervention still vary by recipient group. For example, while the trends in



FIGURE 13: BELIEFS ABOUT GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A DECENT STANDARD OF LIVING / ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION (BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES)

On the whole, do you think it should or should not be the government's responsibility to...

% it definitely/probably should be the government's role

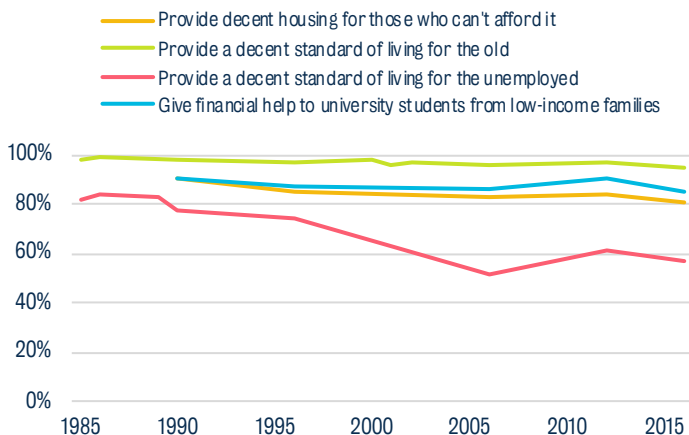
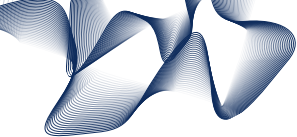


Figure 13 show near unanimous support for the government providing a “decent standard of living” for the elderly since the mid-1980s, dramatic changes can be seen in public views on government responsibility for providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed. In the 1980s more than 80 per cent of people in Britain agreed that this was a role for government, but this fell to around 50 per cent in 2006 and has since stabilised at around 60 per cent.

The trends featured in Figure 13 also suggest that, in some cases, the public afford equal weight to a wider set of opportunities beyond simply fulfilling basic needs. For example, the proportion of people in Britain who believe it is the government’s responsibility to financially support university students from low-income families has roughly tracked the proportion who say the government should provide decent housing for those who can’t afford it. In fact, in recent years the proportion of people who say it is the government’s responsibility to financially support access to higher education has marginally exceeded housing by between 4-8 percentage points.

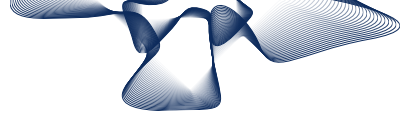


Unpacking how the concepts of control, contribution and opportunity feed into in-group and out-group dynamics towards groups in poverty, can help to interpret public support for action on poverty

One approach to understanding how in-group and out-group dynamics operate in relation to those in poverty is through the “deservingness heuristic”, whereby judgements about whether others should be given help rests on a judgement of whether they are *perceived to be in control* of their circumstances. When it comes to welfare, this judgement typically comes down to whether an individual is seen to work hard, yet be unlucky due to forces beyond their control, or whether they are seen as lazy, in being unwilling to take steps to improve their own circumstances (Aarøe & Peterson, 2014) – reflecting similar dimensions of Individualist and Structuralist worldviews explored in Section 2.

Similarly, the extent to which an individual or group is perceived to be part of a collective in-group that *makes a positive contribution to society* – eg through paying taxes, taking on caring responsibilities, supporting their local community – is another factor in understanding the public’s mixed appetite for action on poverty. Unsympathetic stereotypes of welfare recipients in the UK generally are defined by an imagined out-group who are perceived to actively seek not to contribute; who game the system for their own benefit without putting in effort (Volmert et al., 2016).

The construction of such outgroups rests on seeing those in poverty as “bad” people who deliberately make “poor” choices, and who are unwilling to make a pro-social contribution, rather than attending to wider structural barriers to getting ahead in life (Volmert et al., 2016). One consultee from CRESR highlighted how perceptions of this outgroup are typically driven by the misperception that the need for support from the state is static – ie a cost that is

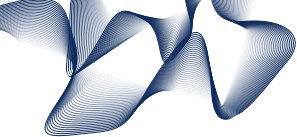


incurred for a lifetime, rather than something that people move in and out of as their circumstances change:

“People say it like it’s a life choice to have lots of kids that people can’t afford because the system enables them, rather than, actually, there are lots of people who end up in the benefit system at various points through losing a job, a recession, a change in circumstance. You have all sorts of things in it, you just happen to be living where you were living, or where you’re brought up and happened to already have two kids.” (CRESR consultation)

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, some suspicion endured about outgroups of people who were perceived to be gaming the system while on furlough or Universal Credit. However, new claimants brought into the welfare system as a result of the unique context of pandemic related restrictions were seen as an exception. The Welfare at a Social Distance project found that the perceived deservingness of those claiming Universal Credit had generally strengthened during the early lockdowns, through the identification of a new group of welfare claimants who were seen to be accessing support due to forces beyond their control:

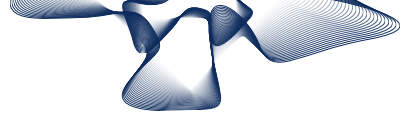
“People made this very clear distinction between there’s this big group of people who’ve lost their jobs for no fault of their own: they were forbidden by the government from going to work, so they didn’t, or their jobs folded; companies went under and so they’re considered to be deserving and they are the exceptional case. ... People who are coming onto Universal Credit during the pandemic are a bit richer, they’re a bit more likely to be educated. ... People have internalised that to some extent and see that ‘These are people like me, and these are part of my in-group. Therefore, I feel like they deserve more support.’” (Robert de Vries, consultation)



Some studies also suggest there is a link between unease about being seen as part of this outgroup and reluctance to access support, such as reducing or delaying benefit take up or foodbank use, as to access these services would threaten people's sense of self-reliance and dignity. For example, one study found that around a third of people in receipt of benefits say they feel stigma around their claim, and just over a quarter of non-claimants say they would be less likely to claim benefits for one or more shame-related reasons (Baumberg, 2016). In focus groups run in Scotland, some respondents similarly noted that they did not use benefits they were entitled to as they felt that they would be negatively judged by others by signalling they were not in work and receiving benefits (Inglis et al., 2019).

Yet there is also sympathy in the UK towards people who are denied opportunities to get ahead in life. While people are seen as being responsible for their own situation, the UK population are generally concerned about unequal distribution of opportunity to live a decent life. Reflecting on focus groups conducted in the UK and Germany, Peter Taylor-Gooby noted:

“There is this interesting finding in the big European studies that, if you look at the UK and Germany, on the standard questions about inequality and whether the state should do something about it, they come out to exactly the same percentage point. ... But then, when you go on and talk to them about it, people in the UK and Germany talk about very different things. In focus groups we ran in Germany, people were generally talking about inequality and issues of deprivation, and they talked specifically about the kinds of policies that should be developed in terms of benefits and redistribution and so on. Whereas people in the UK said there is inequality, but really they were talking about inequality of opportunity, and they started talking about the education system and things like that,

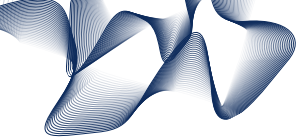


and a bit about their children's opportunities to get housing, decent housing, which then went onto housing supply issues." (Peter Taylor-Gooby, consultation)

The interlinked nature of unequal opportunities in public consciousness was also noted in online discussion groups conducted by Ipsos in spring 2021, as part of the Deaton Review of Inequalities in the 21st Century. Participants discussing access to good quality education also drew links to unequal life chances and employment opportunities later in life; and they linked these inequalities, in turn, to other unsatisfactory outcomes, such as poor mental health, stress and low self-esteem. In particular, there was a distinctly spatial dimension to how participants saw access to opportunities in the UK, particularly at a local level. A core focus of these discussions was on unequal economic opportunities and quality of services between areas of high and low deprivation, particularly when it comes to schools and health services (Pereira, McKeown & Gallacher, 2021).

Putting real-life cases in front of people can help in drawing out more balanced reflection around these dimensions of opportunity, contribution and control, instead of falling back on stereotypes that have a tendency to automatically position those in poverty as an out-group. "The more and more specifics you give about a certain person's situation, the closer and closer those attitudes become because those people are becoming less and less reliant on the stereotypes" (Robert de Vries, consultation).

Aarøe and Petersen (2014) similarly observe an interplay between stereotypes held at a population level, such as those explored in Section 2, and cues about the extent to which a given individual is disadvantaged through dynamics of control – specifically, poor luck and lack of effort. The researchers conducted an experiment in the US and Denmark, two countries with contrasting welfare systems as well as antithetical stereotypes of welfare recipients. In these



experiments, three conditions were tested, each depicting a social welfare recipient: the first without cues, beyond stating the individual receives social welfare; the second emphasising forces outside of the individual's control in preventing them from returning to work, despite wanting to; and the third invoking the "laziness" condition, where the individual has never worked despite being able to do so. When no information was given about the recipient, highly significant differences in opposition to welfare support were observed between respondents in the US and Denmark, corroborating the variation in default stereotypes of welfare recipients between the two countries. However, this effect is "crowded out" when these in-group and out-group characteristics of bad luck and laziness are triggered, with cross-national differences becoming statistically indistinguishable in the latter two treatments.

When it comes to engaging the public in conversations about how to address poverty, De Vries suggested that a more productive way to have these discussions is to focus on the individual, rather than talking about the welfare system in an abstract sense, in recognition of this inbuilt human tendency to be naturally attuned to signals of non-reciprocity. "If you can shrink it down to be a human-scale issue, then you're going to have much more traction than if you are talking about poverty in these broad terms" (Robert De Vries, consultation).

How debates about action on poverty are constructed matters. Focusing on opportunities people need to live a decent life as a wider set of policy interventions can help to talk constructively about the types of action people want to see

The need to change the terms of reference for discussing public preferences for action on poverty was raised in several consultations. This included taking a broader approach in asking "what do people need in today's society? ... What are the acceptable social standards of today?", rather than anchoring the debate specifically around how to meet the



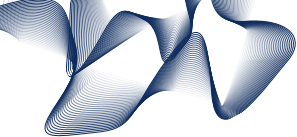
“We tried to design our citizens jury to not use the word ‘poverty’ because we knew it was contested. ... We weren’t trying to stifle it, but we didn’t cue it up, because different types of people have very different perceptions of the term.” – **Andrew Harrop, consultation**

needs of those living in poverty (Christopher Deeming, consultation).

This more expansive framing around what people need to live a decent life is responsive to the disconnect identified in Section 2 between the narrower sense of poverty in the public’s imagination and the more inclusive definition adopted by policymakers. Representatives from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation urged that “rather than trying to persuade the world that they should understand poverty as we do”, the focus of their work has been “more about finding ways to talk about the issues that matter, that we think will actually make a difference to poverty, and finding ways to talk about them and solve them” (JRF, consultation). Others also noted how using the term poverty can often be a barrier to these types of discussions:

“If you are taking forward a set of mental health issues or increasing education or training, you don’t need to link that to poverty. It’s just a good thing in and of itself. ... This is all about improving people’s lives in different ways and improving people’s lives in ways in which I think the public can see as being pragmatic. I don’t know who would disagree that everyone should have the best possible start in life in terms of education and skills. Who would disagree that we should be looking to help children who are going into children’s social care to achieve the best possible outcomes, or to ensure that people leaving prison are in work and don’t go on to reoffend? Those are all things that are, I think, really easy to sell and could have a huge impact on poverty. You just don’t need to say this is about poverty.” (Matthew Oakley, consultation)

There is extensive literature on framing effects that calls for a shift in language in how poverty is talked about (see, for example, O’Neil et al., 2018; JRF, 2019). This includes a shift towards a narrative of common experience of what people need to live a decent life, reducing the “othering”

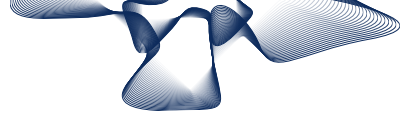


tendency of seeing those in poverty as being somehow in need, along with emphasising poverty reduction policies focused on supporting individuals to overcome personal barriers, such as access to education and employability services (FrameWorks Institute, 2018).

Part of the caution urged around using the term “poverty” is that it can lead the discussion towards a particular stereotype of benefits claimant focused on those out of work. This homogenising of benefits claimants in association with discussions around poverty can be easily triggered. Robert de Vries noted that as soon as you need to label a group, this feeds into the stereotype of that group as being or acting a certain way, unintentionally narrowing the frame of reference:

“The problem is that when you say, ‘Someone is a benefit claimant according to Universal Credit,’ people want to know: ‘Are they a real benefit claimant? Do you mean an unemployed person – a working-age, non-disabled, unemployed person?’ which is what people think ‘a benefit claimant’ means. As hard as you try and get to this universal, heterogeneous idea of what claiming benefits is, there’s this gravity that draws them back towards the idea of, ‘Okay, well, I’ll be talking about the people I want to talk about, which is these people, these scroungers.’ That’s a really hard thing to combat.” (Robert de Vries, consultation)

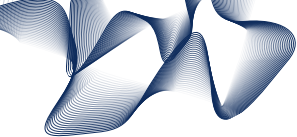
Precedents exist for using opportunity frames in relation to poverty. As Lister (2004) observes, some scholars advocate for a capability-based definition of poverty over income, defined in terms of “the failure of basic capabilities to reach certain minimally acceptable levels”. Capability theorists focus on a “kind of life we want people to be able to achieve in order to flourish” or “a person’s ability to live the kind of life she or he values” rather than on what prevents people from achieving this.



Similarly, scholars working on minimum income standards – which is related to, though does not exclusively address poverty – have advocated focusing on the things that people need to live a decent, healthy life, rather than defining poverty solely in fiscal terms. Minimum income standards refer to the “baskets of goods and services that are considered necessary to reach a minimum standard of living for an individual or household within a given country context, region or city”. Increasingly researchers in this field have widened the scope of what is defined as a minimum standard of living to encompass “people’s capacity to make choices that any citizen ought to be able to make”, and thereby expanded “what was considered ‘basic’ to what was considered necessary in society or socially acceptable” (Deeming, 2020).

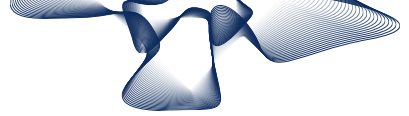
In consultation, Christopher Deeming observed that this shift has occurred over the last twenty years, as a way of “moving away from othering poor people and people in poverty, towards a more inclusive way of approaching this, in a more democratic way”. There are, however, still sensitivities to consider in this kind of approach, particularly in reference to poverty:

“The income standards people (or some of them, at least) start with, would say, “What do ordinary people like yourselves need to live a decent life?” That then moves away from this tricky issue of what poverty is. ... This is more of a consensual approach to a socially defined living standard rather than something that’s set at the lowest level, to keep people out of poverty. There are debates to be had about how effective that has been, because if standards are too high then it tends to be said, ‘Well, that’s not poverty, is it, because you’ve set the living standard too high’. ... But, in some ways, it’s trying to move people out of the idea of just thinking about the lowest level for the poor and for the poorest; moving to a more socially inclusive and less unequal situation, which is about thinking about the social



*protection that everyone needs, including ourselves.”
(Christopher Deeming, consultation)*

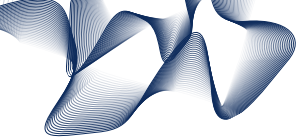
The FrameWorks Institute have similarly developed a “restricts and restrains” metaphor to create more space for talking about opportunity. One of the aims of this metaphor is to capitalise on language that foregrounds wider economic and policy factors and how they shape and constrain what people can do, or can enable them to get out of poverty. In so doing, the metaphor is designed to “help people see that features of the economic system lock people in poverty, limiting opportunities and choices and shaping outcomes”, highlighting “the ways in which systemic economic forces constrain people’s opportunities and life chances” (O’Neill, 2018).



4 | Policy debates for deliberation





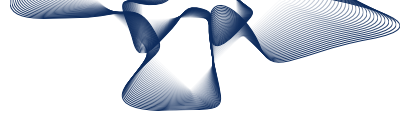


4 | Policy debates for deliberation

Here, we set out a selection of potential policy options to address poverty that could be put to the public as questions for consideration and debate. These options have been put forward by practitioners and academics in the course of our consultations, and are supported by the wider literature. Cutting across these cases, consultees emphasised the importance of giving the public full information, including the likely impact on the public purse when seeking to gauge support for specific policies.

We also know from previous work that people's support for interventions to address poverty and inequality can depend on what they perceive to be the causes of these issues. As outlined in Section 2, there are two dominant mindsets through which the existence of inequalities is rationalised by the British public – the 'Structuralist' and the 'Individualist' worldviews. Holders of the Structuralist perspective see factors outside of an individual's control, such as race or family background, as important in explaining outcomes, while those of an Individualist persuasion are eager to see the world as fair, and believe that outcomes are largely the result of individual efforts. Structuralists tend to be more concerned about inequalities than Individualists, and are more supportive of government intervening to address them.

In Section 3, we observed how these worldviews can be linked to the public's tendency to see particular groups in society as having made different types of contribution as well as having different opportunities available to them. For the policy options proposed below, we consider what groups the measures would best support, and where possible provide an indication of how they are likely to be perceived



by those with Structuralist and Individualist perspectives. Identifying policies that are able to bridge between the two worldviews is particularly important from the perspective of attracting broad-based public support.

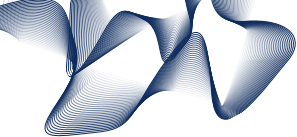
What should the welfare state look like?

Rethinking eligibility for state support and the generosity of support

The question over who should be entitled to receive support from the state, and at what level this support should be set, was mentioned in several of the interviews we conducted.

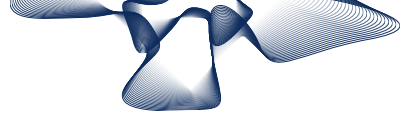
In the context of Scotland, Fiona McHardy from Poverty Alliance pointed to the introduction of a minimum income standard, minimum income guarantees and universal basic income. Universal Basic Income (UBI) involves making a payment to all citizens, irrespective of their financial circumstances, and without conditions attached. This would represent a major departure from the welfare system as currently designed, which offers support based on need via means testing. In Scotland, four local authorities were involved in scoping the feasibility of running local UBI pilots in 2018/19, with a focus on understanding the potential role of UBI in reducing poverty in Scotland. This research was supported by the Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland, culminating in a report to the Scottish Government (Basic Income Scotland, 2021).

Others, however, pointed to the underlying tensions between policy proposals such as UBI and public attitudes to welfare. For example, another consultee highlighted that, while a UBI could be helpful in alleviating the stigma around receiving benefits, the public may not consider it preferable to conditional welfare systems for reasons of perceived deservingness:



Context: The evolution of the welfare state

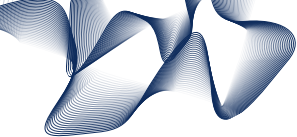
- The numbers of new Universal Credit (UC) claimants grew suddenly at the start of the pandemic, with over a million new applicants in April and May 2020. The number of people on Universal Credit then gradually grew to 6 million in March 2021, though decreasing to 5.6 million by January 2022. However, recent data releases from the Department for Work & Pensions suggest that the number of Universal Credit claimants is again on the rise, creeping up to 5.8 million in October 2022.
- As of May 2021, 60 per cent of UC claimants had conditionalities making them subject to sanctions. But overall, the proportion of benefit claimants receiving sanctions is low. Less than 3 per cent of eligible UC claimants were experiencing sanctions between April 2019 and the pandemic onset; Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions have been less than 0.2 per cent in recent years; and Employment & Support Allowance (ESA) less than 0.1 per cent in recent years (DWP, 2021c).
- For many years, researchers have sought to define a basic standard of living. In 2018-19, 30 per cent of people in the UK did not have enough income to meet that standard (Padley & Stone/JRF, 2021). For households on benefits, this differs based on whether you have children. In 2021, families fully reliant on Universal Credit had incomes 40 per cent short of the Minimum Income Standard if they had children, and 60 per cent short if they didn't (Davis et al./JRF, 2021).
- The public is consistently divided on whether the settings for benefit eligibility are right: in monthly tracking since June 2019, YouGov has consistently found between 35 per cent and 45 per cent of respondents think eligibility criteria are too lax, causing abuse of the system, while between 30 per cent and 40 per cent think criteria are too strict and prevent people in genuine need getting help. Since tracking began, the highest proportion reporting the eligibility settings to be “about right” is 10 per cent (YouGov welfare tracker, 2021).



“At the moment, a lot of the debate is on the principle. Okay, basic income is a good idea. It does away with means testing and it’s universal; it’s not stigmatised; it’s available to everyone. Okay. Is there a public appetite for that? Is there a public appetite for giving people who already have, probably, sufficient means, a basic income as well? Then, if you say, ‘No, wealthy people don’t need the basic income.’ Then, you’re means testing it and then, your universalism starts to unravel.” (Christopher Deeming, consultation)

The Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) is another policy idea that has gained support in Scotland. A report by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) in March 2021 (Statham et al., 2021) proposed that Scotland should adopt a MIG by 2030, which would involve setting a floor below which a household’s income cannot fall, supported by targeted welfare payments and better routes into work. The stated aim of such a policy is to reduce poverty, inequality and insecurity. Implementing a MIG requires policymakers to establish what they consider to be a minimum acceptable standard of living that everyone should be entitled to. As outlined in Section 3, this usually involves developing a reference budget, which stipulates the goods and services people should be able to consume if they are to attain that minimum standard of living, and then calculates the income needed to purchase these (Deeming, 2017).

In consultation, Christopher Deeming spoke about how public attitudes towards minimum income standards link to the conception of what poverty is – typically “the severe deprivation of the basics”. With this idea of poverty in mind, public views about what minimum income standards should entail tend to be depressed, with respondents “lower[ing] their ideas of acceptable living standards to the level of the poor”, and setting them “at the lowest level, to keep people out of poverty”, rather than at a level that may facilitate more participation in ordinary day-to-day activities.



To avoid this tension, researchers are increasingly asking people about minimum income standards without making reference to poverty, encouraging them instead to consider the lives of people like them: “They try to operationalise some of these ideas, without referring to it as poverty – so saying, ‘What are the things that people like yourself need to live a decent, healthy life?’, rather than saying, ‘What do people in poverty need?’” (Christopher Deeming, consultation). Such an approach aims to be more inclusive and effective at establishing a socially-defined living standard. At the same time, Deeming notes a need for caution with this approach as a mechanism for discussing poverty, as if standards are set too high it may move the public away from linking such policies to the prevention of poverty.

The potential for exploring ideas around what is enough to live on as part of a deliberative approach was observed in other consultations too, as well as the relative balance of how those costs should be met by the state as opposed to the individual. “If this is a standard of living that the public thinks is reasonable for most people to aim towards, should the social security system meet 25 per cent, 50 per cent or 75 per cent of that? ... People found grasping this content really, really difficult.” (Andrew Harrop, consultation)

The citizens jury that Harrop references here tested the JRF minimum income standards threshold and whether participants bought into it as a concept. Most were supportive of the approach, and over the course of the workshop went on to “push themselves to a point where they were ready to support more generous payments than at the start. But then pulled back a bit when they were told how expensive it was”.

The eventual outcome was that participants still wanted to see a more generous system, though the majority didn’t support a system tracking minimum income standard levels due to the costs involved. Yet the “idea of an adequacy level



The public are now quite suspicious of giving money to everyone, even if richer people don't need it. ... For example, there is quite a lot of suspicion and ambivalence about giving all parents extra money just because they have kids."

– **Andrew Harrop, consultation**

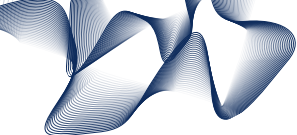
... was [considered] reasonable – the people in the citizens' jury were supportive of that approach and they got it" (Andrew Harrop, consultation).

The public's recent exposure to non-means tested policies such as furlough and the current energy support schemes also have potential for opening up conversations around policies such as earnings replacement during periods of personal transition. Harrop observed that in the Fabian Society's citizens jury there had been a very positive response to more generous earnings-related unemployment support, following discussion of models such as furlough and other continental schemes during the pandemic. "They saw it as linked to work. So it lasted for three or six months as a rainy-day support for someone who was doing a job, to make that connection between their income when unemployed and their previous earnings." This sympathy for support during unexpected life changes also extended to other life events, such as those who experience accidents at work, are sick, or become a carer or parent.

At the same time, the Fabian citizens jury also revealed ambivalence around universal benefits. While there was support in principle for supporting some groups with specific needs, particularly people with disabilities, participants were more ambivalent about universal support for other groups, such as parents. For example, while there was little appetite for increasing child benefit, there was support for universalism with respect to childcare costs: "It was like the sense of injustice that the childcare system didn't provide enough support for people, either just to get into work or to increase their hours" (Andrew Harrop, consultation).

Reforming the sanctions regime

Conditionality has been a feature of European welfare systems since the 1990s, and is closely related to concepts of deservingness (van Oorschot, 2000). Earlier this year, the UK Government introduced a stricter sanctions regime ("Way to Work"), which aimed to get 500,000 people into



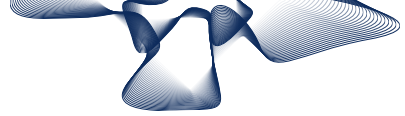
work. A major change in the policy is that claimants are required to search for jobs outside of their sector after four weeks before facing sanctions, whereas they previously had three months to look for jobs in their sector (DWP, 2022). Some studies show near universal support for “supportive” conditionality, such as job training, but forms of more “demanding” conditionality, such as monitoring of job seeking behaviour and related sanctions, have remained more controversial (Fossati, 2018).

The implementation of the sanctioning regime for recipients of unemployment benefits in the UK has also come in for criticism. The independent Oakley Review (2014) into the Jobseeker’s Allowance sanctioning regime concluded that communication with benefits recipients around their obligations and the sanctioning process needed to be improved. Additionally, analysis by de Vries, Reeves and Geiger (2017) uncovered inequalities in the application of sanctions, with younger people, men and members of ethnic minority groups more likely to be subject to sanctions. While they did not explore the reasons for these inequalities, they did highlight the scope for some groups to be treated more harshly than others given caseworkers’ discretion in the application of sanctions.

“

It’s thinking of people as numbers, as these defined parameters that you can fit people into. I think people find that quite distasteful, so I can see that there could be some traction in terms of discussing what the benefit system expects people to fit into. People are just going to respond, ‘That’s not how people live’.” – **Robert de Vries, consultation**

Public attitudes to sanctions and their impact came up as an under-researched area in a small number of consultations. Emerging evidence from the Welfare at a Social Distance project suggests that people still have an instinctive support for conditionality. Robert de Vries observed that when asking about the reintroduction of sanctions, which were suspended during the pandemic, “people found the idea of trying to force people to find work during a pandemic ridiculous ... but they were quite keen on the idea of bringing it back”. For example, sanctions continued to be supported in cases where people would not take jobs they were qualified for or if they would not undertake training. However, they made exceptions for enforcing sanctions on those who were worried about the health impacts of



COVID-19 or who were being asked to travel for more than 45 minutes. Moreover, requirements to relocate to find work, move out of the family home or retrain tended not to resonate with people.

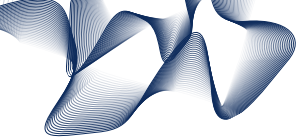
As we move into the context of supporting people through the cost of living crisis, there is, then, an opportunity to reflect on experiences during the pandemic to open up spaces for conversations around the nature of sanctions in the benefits system:

“People are constantly exposed to the idea that, if you want someone to do something and they’re, sort of, recalcitrant and they might not do it, then there has to be some element of punishment. The idea of taking that element of punishment away makes people just immediately assume that claimants will just run riot – there’ll be massive amounts of fraud, and people just won’t do the things that they’re supposed to do. But we’ve seen an increase in conditionality, and that hasn’t necessarily reduced fraud, which was at a low level in first place.” (Robert de Vries, consultation)

Sanctions are an area where it is difficult to imagine agreement between Individualists and Structuralists. The underlying logic of sanctions is inherently individualistic: that being in a better situation – and indeed, complying with any imposed conditionalities – is a matter of doing the right thing and is within the individual’s control.

Moving from a welfare state focused on social protection to one focused on social investment

The need for greater investment in the sorts of public services that can improve life outcomes, such as education, childcare, housing and mental health services, came up frequently in our consultations. Deeming framed the debate as being around setting the right priorities for welfare spending in an environment of limited public resources, and also pointed to the possibility that a shift in focus away from



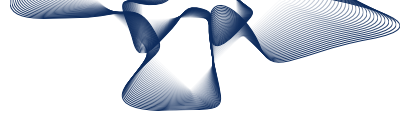
the provision of social security towards social investment could attract greater public support:

“You’re touching on that with ideas that social investment welfare systems, in terms of education or health. These might carry more support than the old welfare systems of social security and pensions.”
(Christopher Deeming, consultation)

The reorientation away from social protection towards social investments is already underway in many Western welfare states (Deeming, 2018). This shift in emphasis would lead to changes in the beneficiaries. While social protection systems directly target those on low incomes (such as the unemployed), social investments can usually be accessed by all. At the same time, the need for these services is likely to be higher among those living in more deprived circumstances, and thus they may benefit more from such investments than those living in more privileged circumstances.

Support for the shift towards a social investment model may differ across different groups in society. Such an approach might appeal more to the middle classes than to those who live in more precarious economic circumstances, for whom the traditional model of redistribution via the welfare state could be more appealing. Indeed, analysis of data from the International Social Survey Program for eight Western countries revealed that support for social policy that guards against social risks (such as the state providing a decent standard of living for the unemployed or pensioners) is higher among working-class respondents than among the middle classes. Such policies were also more popular among older age groups (Deeming, 2018).

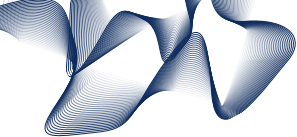
Social investment may be a source of common ground between Structuralists and Individualists. Structuralists would, in principle, be supportive of policies that addressed what they see as the underlying causes of unequal outcomes,



with structural factors themselves (such as access to high quality education) being the target of reform. It is less clear what the position of Individualists would be, but the universalist approach implied by social investment is likely to be more popular than the targeted approach of social protection. However, while Structuralists might welcome policies that address structural causes of poverty, they are unlikely to support the removal of social protection, as even in the best-case scenario it is unlikely that there will be a wholesale dismantling of perceived structural determinants of poverty.

Despite these tensions, shifting the focus of discussion in deliberative forums from social protection to social investment may also help to mitigate some of the challenges in discussing the welfare system, touched upon earlier in this report. Reflecting on citizens' fora run by the Fabian Society, Andrew Harrop observed:

“It’s really hard talking to members of the public about social security. First of all, there’s stigma. So when you first tell them what they’re there to talk about there is a bit of an intake of breath. They feel that they don’t know anything about the subject, and don’t particularly feel comfortable talking about it. Then in terms of the design of the groups, ... designing qualitative research that basically gets people deep enough into an issue and makes them feel comfortable and gets meaningful insights out is really hard. In our recent jury we were probably on the ambitious side in terms of the breadth of issues that we tried to get them to cover over those four two-hour sessions. ... Looking back at our transcripts we’ve said, ‘if only we’d been able to go deeper into that particular issue,’ but we were trying to skate widely over the whole of the social security system. Going deep just wasn’t possible.”
(Andrew Harrop, consultation)

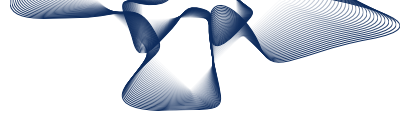


Other studies have also found greater public support for “equality of opportunity” policies over “equality of outcome” policies to address issues of poverty and lack of opportunity. Looking at the US, UK and Sweden, Alesina, Stancheva & Teso (2018) find that, among those who perceived inter-generational mobility to be lower (ie fewer opportunities for poor children to move out of poverty), support for redistribution by government tended to be higher. However, this relationship was stronger when considering policy options such as education and health spending than when considering more redistribution via the tax system or the provision of social safety nets.

What are the benefits of pushing for reform to tackle poverty locally?

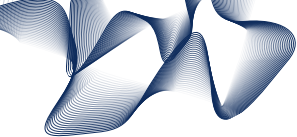
Research on poverty in the UK has stressed the importance of community solutions, and the role of community organisations and relationships that transfer power to local communities to address poverty (Hodgson et al., 2019). For example, many of the pathways identified by the Centre for Social Justice (2018) to build the types of trusting relationships they consider vital to reducing poverty are focused on the community level, such as neighbourhood safety, relationships with family, stable housing tenure, and greater agency among communities over life in their local area.

Local or community interventions can be economic or social in their focus, though some right-leaning think tanks such as the Centre for Social Justice and Onward have recently emphasised addressing social decline in left-behind communities over economic measures. The Centre for Social Justice (2018) advocate a focus on factors such as addiction, indebtedness and low educational attainment, while Onward (Tanner et al., 2021) propose giving more



Context: Geographic variation in poverty levels

- Different levels of poverty are present between areas of the UK, whether defined at higher or lower levels of geography. When the UK is divided into 40 small areas, the poverty rate ranges from 12 per cent in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, to 30 per cent in the Scottish Highlands and Islands (ONS, 2021a). This variation is broadly consistent with the range when evaluated across 13 regions, but masks much greater variation at the level of electoral constituencies – which, for children, ranged from 8 per cent in Windsor to 53 per cent in Hodge Hill, Birmingham (Francis-Devine, 2021).
- Regional differences in income levels seem to favour London, but when housing costs are considered, there is little difference between incomes in London and the UK average (Agrawal & Phillips/IFS, 2020).
- National-level policy can affect local poverty and deprivation in divergent ways. Analysing the local impacts of the post-2010 welfare reforms, Beatty and Fothergill (2014) found that the changes (which included both tightening eligibility for benefits and reducing the value of payments) hit more deprived parts of the UK, including old industrial areas, seaside towns and some London boroughs, harder than more prosperous ones. Given the knock-on impacts of reduced local benefits income on local spending and local employment, the authors saw the policy changes as widening existing gaps in prosperity across the country.



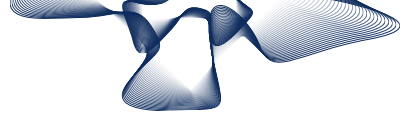
power and resources to individuals and communities to invest in their communities. This includes measures to encourage volunteering, civic participation, to promote stable families, etc.

In consultation, a researcher from the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University spoke about their involvement in the evaluation of a Big Lottery funded project called ‘Fulfilling Lives’ in West Yorkshire – a project aimed at improving the lives of those with complex needs, including homelessness, addictions, offending and severe mental health problems. The evaluation highlighted the importance of the very localised mode of delivery for outcomes:

“Within those recovery communities, certainly for those who have gone through addictions, it is the very small-scale, local groups, and geographically local, that were really important to people’s recovery. It is because of that peer support. I think those kinds of cases, even for people who are really marginalised and vulnerable, there is actually a lot of value firstly in having a centre that they can drop into, an open house. There were recovery centres where you can go and meet people that can give you the formal support, but also the informal support from your peers is essential.” (CRESR consultation)

It is important, however, to distinguish between types of localised approach – in particular, national interventions delivered locally (such as the New Deal for Communities) and community-led interventions. In the CRESR consultation, the limited evidence base for the effectiveness of the latter was noted, as well as the mixed evidence on the effectiveness of the former.

Where these projects were felt to have made the greatest difference was more in the “things that are almost tangible and visible in the area and made people feel better about



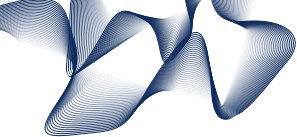
the places in which they lived, because they could see that investment, they could see the improvement” – not necessarily their success in moving the dial on hard outcomes like income.

Evidence discussed in the CRESR consultation suggested that policymakers can focus too much on hard outcomes, such as incomes and employment, to the exclusion of other important outcomes that place-based investments can demonstrably affect:

“[I]f you purely look at numbers and the outcomes of people that move into work or increase their household incomes, you often miss the really important, qualitative, life-changing experiences that a small number of people might have benefitted from. I think there was another thing about the New Deal for Communities that was lost, actually. I think one of the most significant findings that was never really picked up on or that I have heard discussed since, was that there was a statistically significant improvement in mental well-being for people living in New Deal for Communities areas that was associated with perceptions of area. So if you thought your area had improved over the previous... years, you were more likely to experience an improvement in your mental well-being.” (CRESR consultation)

Similarly, in the context of a NCVO intervention to help people in deprived communities into employment through volunteering (Bashir et al., 2013), the benefits as experienced by participants often related as much to improvements in health and wellbeing or engagement in their community as employment:

“It was interesting because when you did a lot of the interviews, the people on the programme, they really valued it and it made a huge difference to people who had mental health issues. Often, they weren’t focused



on the employment side, so what they really value was the volunteering: things like, 'I love the interaction', 'I like the social contact with people'." (CRESR consultation)

The role of place-based or community-led interventions is also emphasised in the wider literature, though the need for a thorough consideration of their appropriateness is also urged. For example, Taylor and Buckley (2017) note that place-based approaches have been the principal method used by governments in the UK and elsewhere to respond to the challenges of concentrations of poverty and deprivation. At the same time, they argue that past initiatives highlight the need for a clear rationale for: why an approach should be place-based, what it hopes to achieve and how; the need to link the place to its wider context rather than treating it in isolation; and recognition that change takes time, so the sustainability of the intervention needs to be factored in at the start.

Localised approaches to reform have come in for critique, however. Popay (2020) argues that community-led solutions put already disadvantaged groups under greater scrutiny, and place responsibility for addressing an area's challenges on the community itself, further removing responsibility from the state. However, it is striking that public concern about area-based inequalities in Great Britain is distinctive in international context: comparative surveying shows that concern about inequalities between more and less deprived areas is much higher in Britain than in Western Europe, North America and Australia (Duffy et al., 2021b). Moreover, research suggests that this concern over inequalities between more and less deprived areas is shared by both Structuralists and Individualists in Britain (Benson et al., 2021a). Although voters in both groups may be sympathetic to the principle of designing policy to assist those living in less affluent neighbourhoods, it will be the specifics of the intervention, rather than its geographic focus, that ultimately determines support.



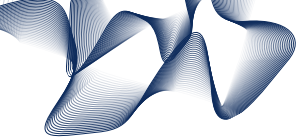
How can we break the link between poverty and insecure employment?

There has been a rise in in-work poverty in Britain in the last 20 years. And particularly for larger families, work may no longer pay when earning the minimum wage. Given the strength of public support for the principle that work should be rewarded, policymakers have a strong mandate to implement policy that achieves this.

Our consultation with the JRF touched on the need for policy to target economic insecurity, where people live in precarious financial situations with low incomes, insecure employment and few savings, as well as addressing chronic

Context: Levels of in-work poverty and insecure employment

- Work is not a protection from poverty. The poverty rate among working households was 17 per cent in 2019-20 (McNeil & Parkes, 2021). Among the 4.3m children in poverty in the UK in 2019-20, 75 per cent lived in a working household (CPAG, 2021).
- Work and benefits are not mutually exclusive: around 40 per cent of Universal Credit claimants in England are in work (LGIInform, 2022).
- Around a million people, or 3 per cent of all employed people are on zero hours contracts (ONS, 2021b). Zero hours jobs are more likely than other contract types to be low paying, have insecure pay and insecure hours, and underemployment (Koumenta & Williams, 2018).
- 59 per cent of zero hours contract workers report that they want more hours. 51 per cent reported having hours cancelled with less than 24-hours notice (Trades Union Congress, 2017).

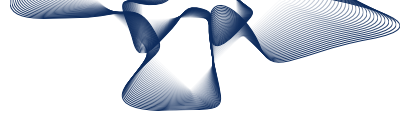


poverty and deprivation. JRF interviewees suggested that policy in this area should look beyond the welfare system to structural factors such as the operation of the labour market, the appropriate balance between labour market flexibility and regulation, and the potential impact of shifting this balance on employment:

“I do think, whether we call it insecurity or ladders to opportunity, there have been some big shifts in the balance of risk, the distribution of risk, in society; the ways in which some key markets – like the housing market, labour market – ask and offer in relation to the social security system. COVID aside, there has been a set of quite deep shifts that have led to opportunity being constrained, insecurity being more widespread... where risk is distributed in how markets are structured and how state support is ordered.” (JRF consultation)

Other interviewees similarly emphasised the importance of viewing issues with the labour market in a holistic sense. As Andrew Harrop noted, the dominance of working families on Universal Credit, who are still nowhere close to meeting adequate living standards, points to injustices within the wider system, not just issues of low pay:

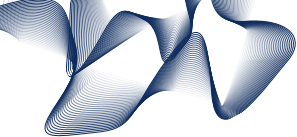
“If you look at it through the lens of someone who is working a sensible amount of hours for their circumstances, and is still nowhere near to having a decent income, then it’s clear there’s something wrong with the welfare state. ... It’s [not just] because they’re not getting paid enough per hour, ... it’s usually about personal circumstances – how many children you have, housing costs in your area, and if for good reason you can’t work full-time (or there’s two of you and you can’t both work full-time) – those are the real drivers of poverty, rather than [just] low pay.” (Andrew Harrop, consultation)



The need to look at policy beyond the welfare state to tackle poverty and insecurity also came out strongly from the literature we reviewed. Recent reports by the IPPR and Resolution Foundation argue that in-work poverty could be addressed through measures including support for skills and training, efforts to improve the quality of work and provision of more opportunities for progression, in addition to greater income support via the social security system (Judge & Slaughter, 2020; McNeill & Parkes, 2021).

The importance of affordable childcare in facilitating access to work and increased working hours is also emphasised by various sources (for example, Treanor et al., 2017; McNeill & Parkes, 2021; Dallimore, 2016). The Legatum Institute, for example, advocate for expanded measures of child poverty that not only take account of household income, but of costs (such as childcare, disability, housing) and debts (Stroud, 2021).

Labour market reform may be an area where Individualists and Structuralists can find common ground. Structuralists are likely to support reforming labour market structures for the benefit of workers, particularly those who are low paid and/or insecurely employed. Individualists, for their part, are likely to support policies that more closely link reward to effort: replacing a system that promotes in-work poverty with one where work provides opportunities for those who are willing to take them.

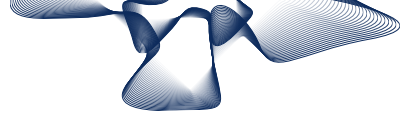


What can be done to help reduce poverty among people with disabilities?

Some experts we spoke to emphasised the importance of rethinking policy for people with disabilities, many of whom live in deep poverty. For some in this group, work is never going to be a viable option, pointing to the importance of considering other policy solutions to relieve hardship and deprivation.

Context: Higher poverty rates among people with a disability

- The poverty rate among people with disabilities is about 50 per cent higher than among people without. Nearly half of people in poverty in the UK either have a disability themselves or live with someone who does. And in 2019-20, 32 per cent of people with disabilities in the UK were living in poverty, compared to about 20 per cent of people without disabilities (JRF, 2022).
- At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, people receiving Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit received an uplift of £20 week; however, those on “legacy benefits” – the majority of whom have a disability – did not benefit from this uplift. 78 per cent of disabled people claiming legacy benefits reported that their financial situation had worsened during the pandemic, with a third finding it difficult to get to medical appointments because of the cost of transport (Disability Benefits Consortium, 2021).
- Research by the disability charity Scope estimates that disability increases an individuals’ cost of living by about £580 per month (John et al., 2019). The benefits system has dedicated support to cover these costs, but disability advocates point to a rate of 70 per cent successful appeals (BBC, 2021) to access these funds.



Reflecting on work conducted as part of the Social Mobility Commission, Matthew Oakley emphasised the failures of the government's efforts to help people with disabilities into work:

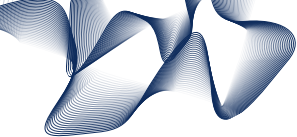
"We haven't meaningfully closed the disability employment gap other than getting closer to full employment for everyone, but some groups are still at 40 per cent employment within that. The costs have gone up massively. The claimant numbers have gone up massively. People are getting further and further away from work because more and more people are being put into the support group because of the complete disaster that was the work capability assessment. Disabled people and their representatives absolutely hate it, and feel vilified and completely badly treated."
(Matthew Oakley, consultation)

Oakley went on to stress the need for policy to distinguish between those who are willing and able to work, and those for whom this is unrealistic:

"We still look at the disability employment gap and we include people who neither want to work nor, in all likelihood, have very, very small chances of working. We need to be much smarter about how we differentiate policy and our ambitions for different people and be much clearer about that." (Matthew Oakley, consultation)

He suggested that what is required is less focus on controlling who is eligible for support on the grounds of disability, and more of an overt commitment to ending poverty among people with disabilities:

"At the moment we are so tied up on the gateway and efficiency and saving money we are leaving half the disabled people living in poverty. Whereas if we decide what we care about is that no one who is disabled

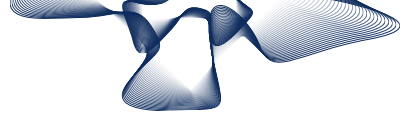


should live in poverty, we'd say frankly we are willing to spend an extra billion pounds on a loose gateway because that means that we are ensuring that those who really need it are definitely not going to be in poverty."
(Matthew Oakley, consultation)

For certain types of disabilities, positive advances in policy and practice have been constrained by the context of austerity. For people with learning disabilities, deinstitutionalisation in the 1980s and 1990s led to a range of positive outcomes both in terms of individuals and in terms of integration and participation (Emmerson and Hatton, 1996). Deinstitutionalisation was part of a broader policy change from “warehousing” people to enabling people to have autonomy over their lives while providing support for them to live as independently as possible within their own communities. However, in recent years this goal has been undermined by financial constraints on local authorities and commissioning groups. Recent research suggests that austerity has necessitated reducing the care available to many adults with learning disabilities, which in turn has implications for their wellbeing (Malli et al., 2018; Forrester-Jones et al., 2021).

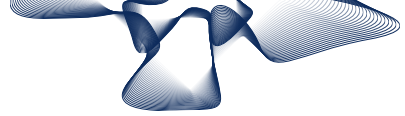
We know from existing research that need is seen as an important dimension of fairness and deservingness. In a survey of Western European and US respondents, Pontusson et al. (2020) found that the allocation of resources according to individual effort or investment received less support than allocation according to need. Similarly, in focus group research in the UK, Bamfield and Horton (2009) found that, while ideas of rewarding merit and effort were powerful, people were also sympathetic to the importance of meeting needs and assisting those with challenging personal circumstances.

Looking at the attitudes of those with different inequality worldviews, Benson et al. (2021a) find that while both Individualists and Structuralists emphasise the importance



of a society rewarding hard work, there is also a shared belief that those who are in need should be taken care of, irrespective of their reciprocal contribution to society. These findings suggest that the public are likely to support efforts to alleviate poverty among those in need, such as people with disabilities. Moreover, this support is not contingent on the recipient making a contribution in return (for example, by entering the labour market), indicating measures to end poverty among disabled people that do not involve pushing them towards work could still bridge across these underlying attitudinal divides.





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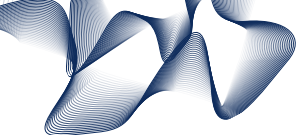
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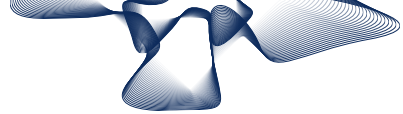
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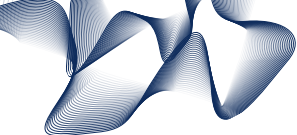
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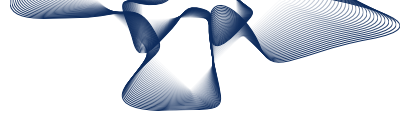
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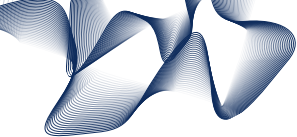
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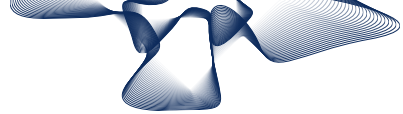
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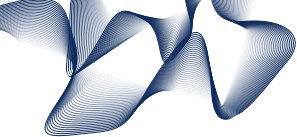
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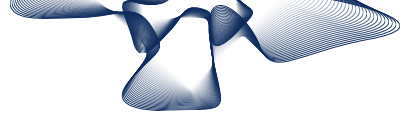
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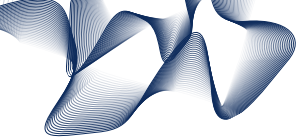
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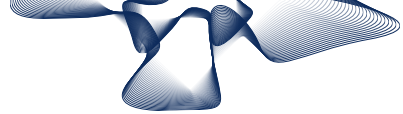
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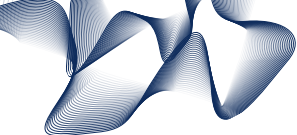
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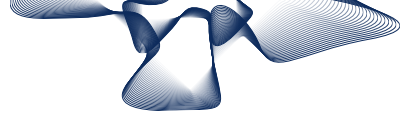
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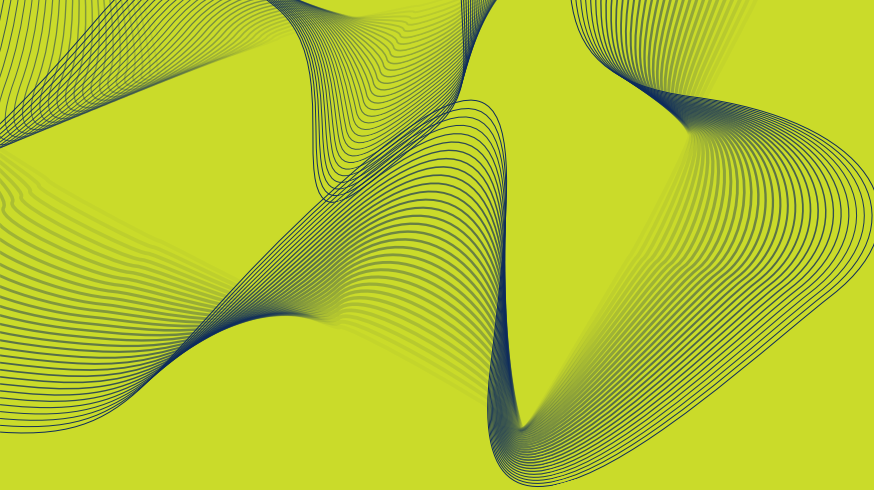
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