

A stylized illustration of a man with a muscular physique, wearing a white apron over a brown shirt and a red and white checkered scarf. He is smiling and pushing a blue stroller. The background is a bright yellow and white abstract design.

Exploring a Future Welfare State



A Pilot Survey on the Basic Income

JASON LEMAN

MARCH 2014

Sheffield Equality Group




Sheffield Equality Group


Sheffield Equality Group is an evidence based campaign affiliated to the national Equality Trust, looking at the harm caused by the unequal sharing of income and wealth.

sheffieldequality.wordpress.com



The **Centre for Welfare Reform** works to redesign the welfare state in order to increase social justice, promote citizenship, strengthen families and enrich our communities.

www.centreforwelfarereform.org

About the Author

Jason Leman has worked in survey design and analysis for over a decade. He has researched political involvement and activity as part of gaining a Masters in Research.

Jason is a member of the Sheffield Equality Group.

Exploring a Future Welfare State

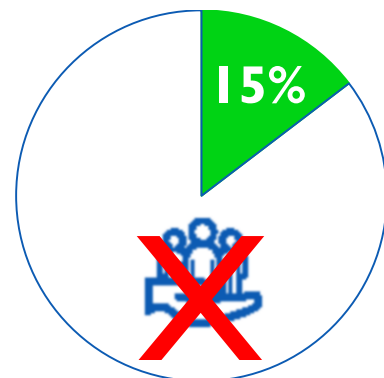
A Pilot Survey on the Basic Income

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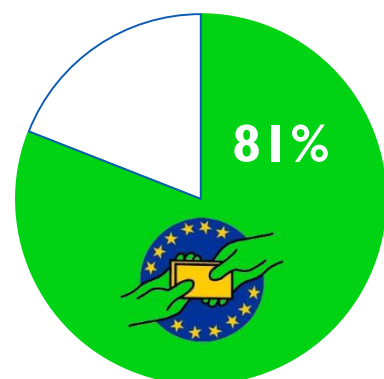
45 respondents were interviewed, broadly representative of the UK population. Questionnaire items worked well overall.

Just 15% of respondents agreed that welfare and benefits works well for the country.



Factors such as conditionality and who is defined as a "citizen" play a big part in decisions to support for a Basic Income.

Four out of five (81%) respondents agreed that the Basic Income should be brought in for every citizen in the UK.



44% would not take a job with fairly poor working conditions if getting a Basic Income, particularly younger respondents.

44%



95%



Nearly all (95%) would take a job with good working conditions if getting a Basic Income.

42% of respondents thought that many people would just sit around and do nothing if receiving a Basic Income



42%



85%

85% of respondents thought that a Basic Income would help businesses find temporary and flexible workers

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1. Background

The Basic Income or Citizens Income is the idea that every adult citizen of a country will receive a guaranteed level of support, regardless of their income.

A meeting was hosted by Sheffield Equality Group¹ on the possible actions around the current state of welfare reform. One proposal, building on the work of the Centre for Welfare Reform², was made to carry out a survey that would act to “myth-bust” around the current state of the welfare system as well as gather information on perceptions of the basic income.

Thanks should be given to everyone who participated in the discussions, helped draft this survey and carry out the interviews. In particular, thanks to Jack Czauderna, Simon Duffy, Peter Hartley, Sarah Mirza, Rachel Strange, Marc Van der Herten and Jean Wildgoose.

¹ <http://sheffieldequality.wordpress.com/>

² <http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/>

2. Methodology

The first draft survey used questions from the European Social Survey and concepts explored in *Money for Everyone* by Malcolm Torry (2013). Questions focussed on unemployment, finding work, and low-paid work. Research by Roosma et al (2012) indicated that in the UK the most likely barriers to people supporting the basic income are people thinking that:

1. Welfare makes people lazy and many try and cheat the system.
2. Inequality (poverty and wealth) motivates people;
3. Welfare harms the economy;
4. Government should be limited;

Questions were collated and constructed that aimed to explore these issues. A draft questionnaire was put through multiple revisions, with feedback gained both from individuals and group testing.

Testing of the questionnaire revealed several problems:

- Asking people about whether Basic Income should be given to particular groups e.g. support for Asylum Seekers, was likely to gain strongly socially acceptable, rather than truthful, answers;
- Welfare and benefits were found to be difficult issues that could disrupt rapport early on in the survey;
- Asking people questions on their views of welfare and benefit claimants was likely to contextualise subsequent responses;
- Some of the questions in the European Social Survey were found to be quite complex and difficult to answer in a straightforward manner;
- Talking about amounts of money, for example how much people needed to live on, or would wish to gain instead of working, was problematic;
- For a volunteer led survey with no inducements and requiring the respondent to read a piece of information the survey needed to be short, simple, and easy to relate.

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The survey was constructed to focus on Basic Income rather than attempt to gain wider views on benefits and welfare, although some of the questions did approach these issues via the lens of Basic Income. A final questionnaire was agreed and can be seen in Appendix 1.

Interviewees were recruited via friends and acquaintances of the group, alongside a series of interviews in the street. The sample is therefore highly non-random. However, the primary aim was to assess the diversity of response, pilot the survey and explore possible results and consideration for a wider scale survey.

After a first round of interviews some additional amendments were made to the information sheet that was used to inform interviewees about the current welfare system and the basic income. The information sheet is shown in Appendix 2.

Interviewees were informed of the topic of the survey and the use of the results before being invited to continue, or decline to participate. After completion of the interview, interviewees were given booklets with a summary of information on welfare and the Basic Income, along with contact details for lead researcher.

3. Results

Forty-five responses were gathered in total from a mixture of people known to the group and not known. In general, respondents were able to answer the questions. Just under half (48%) of the respondents were employed, compared to around 60% nationally³. The remainder were unemployed, retired, students or self-employed. Just under half (45%) of the respondents had claimed some kind of benefit. 45% had an undergraduate qualification⁴ and over half (58%) of the respondents were female. There was a fairly good spread of respondents across ages, with 54% aged 46 years or older compared to 46% nationally. The sample therefore under-represented employment slightly and also has a slight over-representation of educated, older and female respondents.

Perhaps the most important variation from the general population will be that the groups recruited from were highly selective. Volunteers for street interviews could be more likely to view volunteering more positively in general, and were more likely to hold strong views around welfare and benefits, either positively or negatively. Those who were acquaintances of interviewees were more likely to hold broadly similar views, although it should be noted that even within the research team there were a diversity of views around the validity and worth of the Basic Income.

³ <http://bit.ly/1pb2i9p> (ONS)

⁴ Compared to 38% nationally http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_337841.pdf

3.1 Perceptions of how well the welfare and benefits system works

Initial questions on how well the welfare state worked gained a clear negative response. This was particularly the case for whether welfare and benefits worked well for the country as a whole, where just 15% agreed the system worked well (Figure 1.2). Figure 1.1 shows that a third of respondents (32%) agreed that welfare and benefits worked well for people who needed support. Whilst more positive that the view of how the system worked for the country as a whole, this was still a very negative perception of the existing system. It should be noted that respondents answered these questions before being shown the information card detailing some issues with the current welfare system.

Figure 1.1 Welfare and benefits works well for people who need support

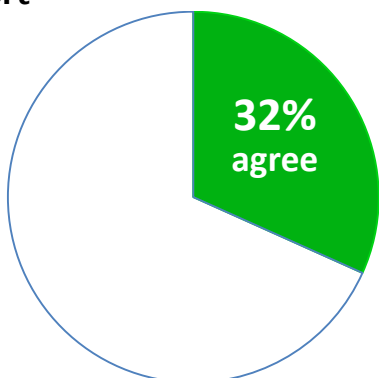
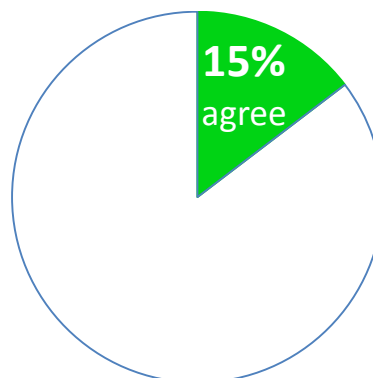


Figure 1.2 Welfare and benefits works well for the country as a whole

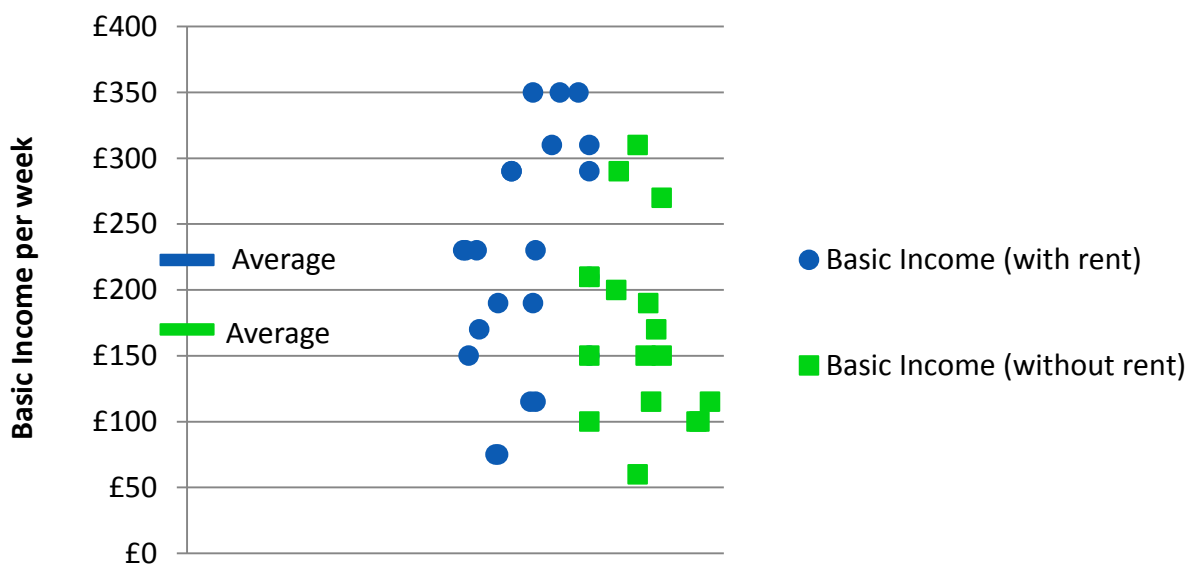


There was some indication that those who were unemployed were more likely to agree that welfare and benefits worked well than those who did not receive such support, however the difference was not significant and we cannot be confident the result would remain with a larger sample. This was generally the case with other breakdowns on the data and whilst there were a couple of significant demographic differences around the employment scenarios, a larger sample will be needed to evaluate broader differences.

3.2 How much should a Basic Income be?

After being presented with information on some background issues in welfare and benefit support, and given an outline of the idea of a Basic Income, participants were asked to give their view on how much a Basic Income should be. In testing it was apparent that people find it difficult to gauge how much would be an appropriate amount, particularly if rent were included. There was a significant difference between rent being included, with an average response of £170, and not, with an average response of £222 (Figure 2). However, this difference does not reflect the extent to which rent is a major household cost. Most people (85%) estimated amounts based on just on supporting a single person, rather than families. The impression from interviews was that responses were contextualised by a person’s own circumstances, experience, and views on benefits and support. In a large sample there may be some differences by, for example, employment or education, the sample was not sufficient to distinguish population differences from the wide variation seen in responses.

Figure 2 Spread of responses on how much a basic income be per week for an individual, by whether including or excluding rent



3.3 What impact would Basic Income have on employment and work?

Several scenarios were presented to people that placed them in the situation of receiving a Basic Income that left them, after housing costs, with £100 per week. They were then asked if they would be willing, if unemployed and receiving the basic income, to take up full-time employment (giving them an additional £150 per week) or a full-time voluntary placement.

Figure 3 Willingness to take up full-time positions on Basic Income

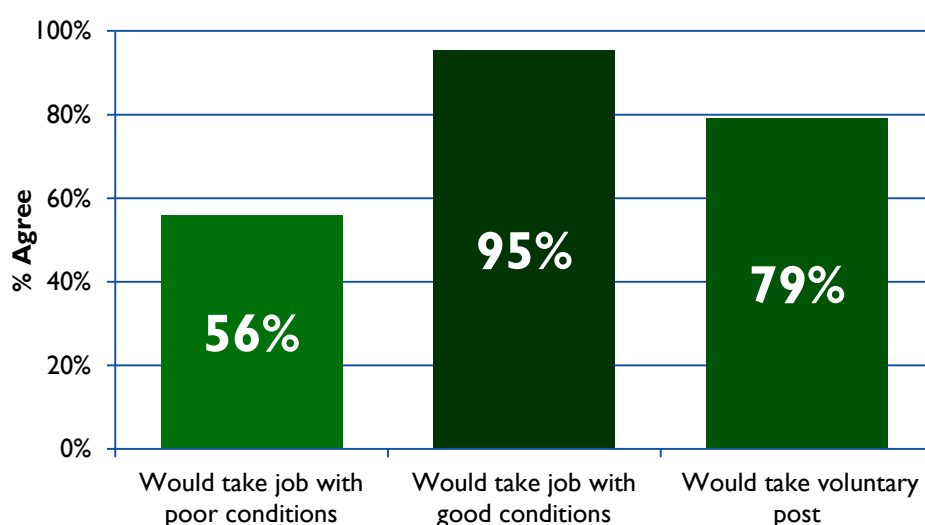


Figure 3 shows that over half (56%) of those questioned thought they would take up employment in a job that had relatively poor conditions (not interesting, long commute, and inflexible). This contrasted with nearly all respondents (95%) stating they would take up a job that had relatively good conditions (interesting, local, and flexible). The rate of pay offered was the same in the two cases.

Older respondents were significantly⁵ more likely to state that they would take a job with poor working conditions, perhaps reflecting different attitudes to employment and support. People who had claimed some form of benefits were also significantly⁶ more likely to state that they would take the job, possibly reflecting different expectations and experiences around employment.

⁵ Chi-Squared (1, N = 43) = 5.8, p = 0.02 (Yates continuity correction applied)

⁶ Chi-Squared (1, N = 38) = 4.1, p = 0.04 (Yates continuity correction applied)

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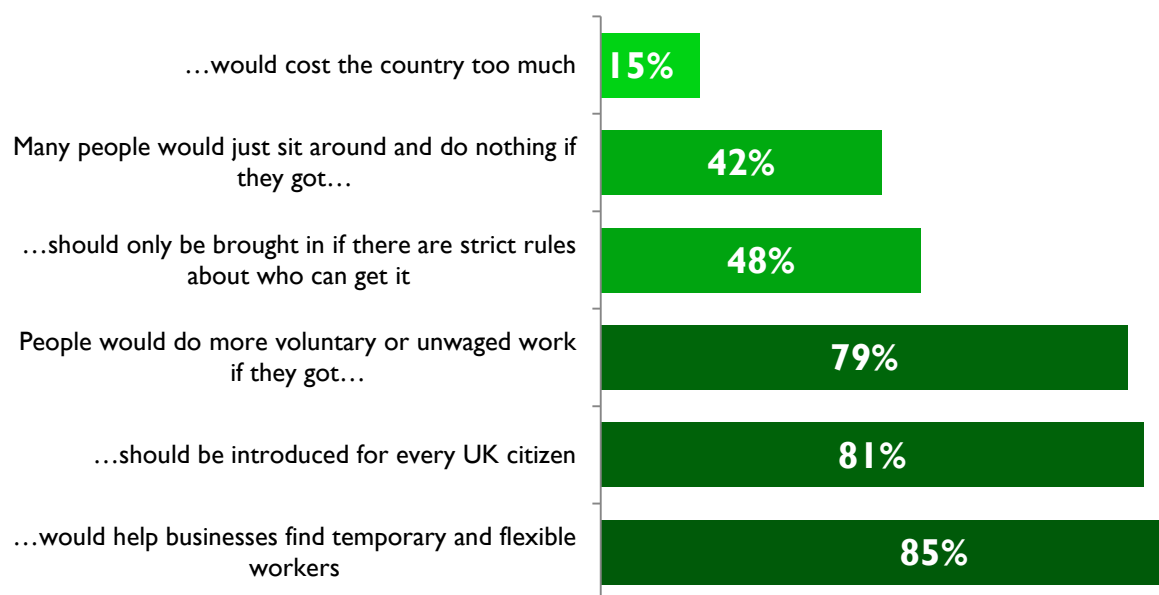
Over three quarters (79%) of respondents stated they would take up a full-time voluntary post in an organisation that interested them. Responses indicated that several respondents who would not take up a post full-time would take up a post that was not full-time.

Caution should be exercised over these results as the scenarios asked people to place themselves in a situation that they would possibly have no experience of. For example, all employed respondents stated they would take a full-time voluntary post, whereas others who were possibly in a position to undertake such work were less likely to say they would take the post, and were more likely to be uncertain.

3.4 Attitudes to a Basic Income

In general people were very positive about the idea of a Basic Income. Over three-quarters (81%) agreed that a Basic Income should be brought in for every UK citizen, and an even greater proportion (85%) thought that it would help businesses find temporary and flexible workers.

Figure x Attitudes to a Basic Income



Over three-quarters (79%) also thought a Basic Income would encourage people to do more voluntary or unwaged work. In contrast, just 15% thought it would cost the country too much. However, many people found the question on whether it would cost the country too much a difficult question to answer.

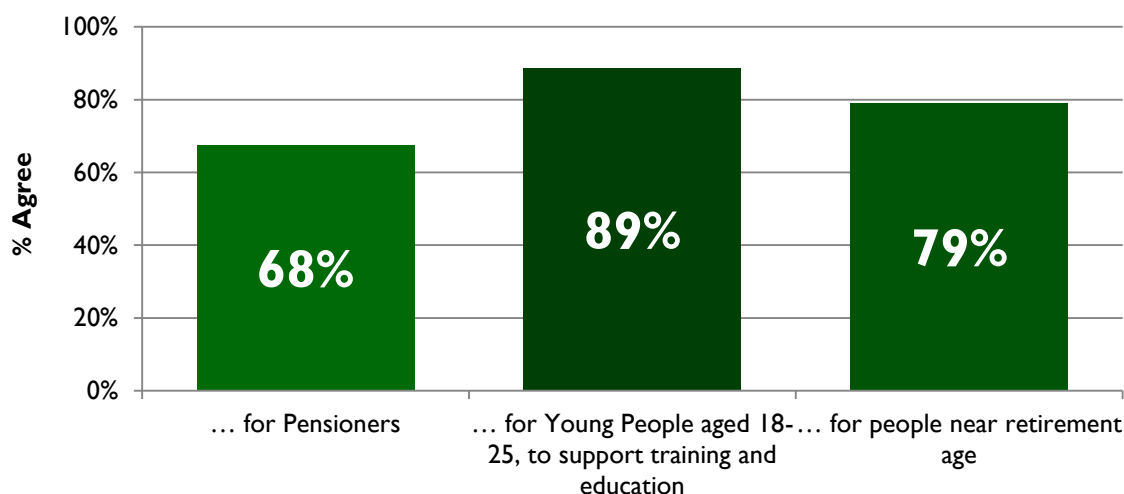
Under half (42%) thought that many people would sit around and do nothing if they received a Basic Income. Partly related to this, a similar proportion (48%) thought that there should be strict rules around who could receive a Basic Income. Some of this related to thinking that there should be a level of conditionality, for example whether people worked or based on how much people earned. Others thought this should be around matters of citizenship, for example not applying to recent immigrants.

3.5 Basic Income for Particular Groups

Whilst the principle of a Basic Income is that it is universal, it has been suggested that one way to progress to a Universal Basic Income is to bring it in for particular groups (Torry 2013 pp50). To explore this a questionnaire asked whether a basic income should be brought in for pensioners, young people, and people near retirement age.

Nearly two-thirds (68%) agreed that the Basic Income should be brought in for pensioners. One of the difficulties for respondents in answering this was that they wanted to know if the level of basic income was higher or lower than the state pension. In effect the state pension was perceived as being an existing Basic Income for pensioners. Reflecting this, over three-quarters (79%) agreed that the Basic Income should be brought in for people near retirement age. Some questioned the reasoning for this, and positively responded to the suggestion that it would enable people near retirement age to work part-time.

The highest level of agreement was the proposal of a Basic Income for young people, aged 18-25, where 89% of people were in agreement. However, with this has to be added a caveat. The question was contextualised with the aim of such a benefit, however it was interpreted, at least by some respondents, as a conditionality. In other words, they interpreted the statement as meaning that those not in education or training would not receive the Basic Income. This proved a useful point to explore perceptions of conditionality that had, until that point, not been expressed.



4. Conclusions

The pilot survey was successful in evaluating general perceptions around Basic Income. The survey also evidenced particular areas where any future survey would need to carefully evaluate findings and explore possible reasons for response.

Perhaps one of the most concerning results for any policy maker was that just 15% of respondents agreed that the current system of welfare and benefits was working well for the country as a whole. The reasons for disagreement appeared to differ across respondents, yet there is a clear feeling that the status quo is not desirable. These results echo those of a national survey, which found that that 23% of people in Britain thought the benefits system works effectively (Ipsos Mori 2011).

As with any survey, responses are dependent on what information the respondent can access to answer the question (Zaller and Feldman 1992). Where respondents do not have access to information desired by the question, they will tend to default to what they do know about. This was observed in the wide spread of responses to a question on what the Basic Income should be, which was not greatly affected by whether rent was included or excluded from the question. Responses appeared to be heavily contextualised by views on support alongside personal experience. It is suggested that it would be very difficult to gain a reliable response regarding what the level of a Basic Income should be in any survey of public attitudes.

Whilst the majority of respondents were in favour of a Basic Income, this had a strong, and sometimes unexpressed, relationship with conditionality. Respondents would agree to questions but then vocalise “as long as they are trying”. In any plan to implement an Unconditional Basic Income, there would therefore need to be a discussion over the extent to which, when someone requires motivation, the threat of ceasing financial support is appropriate or necessary, and what other motivation could be applied. A future survey would need to explore further issues around conditionality and how to “surface” attitudes around conditionality.

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Accepting the issues with conditionality, there were indications that introducing some form of Basic Income for those aged between 18 and 25 could gain wide support. In reference to their own experiences, most respondents stated they would work if in receipt of a Basic Income. However, on the basis of these results a Basic Income may mean that work that has poor terms and conditions may be less appealing, particularly for younger people. Conversely, respondents strongly agreed that flexible or temporary positions would be more likely to be filled if there was a Basic Income, indicating that this is an important factor supporting the introduction of a Basic Income. There were also indications that voluntary work could receive a boost from the introduction of a Basic Income. The valuing of voluntary and unwaged work might benefit from more in-depth exploration in any future study.

All this has to be qualified with the knowledge that some aspects of the Basic Income will be outside of the experience of the respondent, and therefore responses are an estimation of the response to an actual implementation of the scheme. This said, the pilot survey was a successful exercise and could form the foundation for a nationally representative survey exploring attitudes to a Basic Income.

5. References

Ipsos Mori (2011) Future State of Welfare: Vast majority support benefits system - but want the system to be stricter (Online)

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Basic Income Questionnaire

Hello, my name is and I am carrying out this survey on behalf of Sheffield Equality Group and the Centre for Welfare Reform. I'd like to ask you some questions about different ways of supporting people on low incomes. The questionnaire takes about ten minutes, would that be ok?

We think the current system of welfare and benefits, things like pensions, housing benefit, working families tax credit, is not working for a lot of people in need. We would like to find out people's views on a different way of supporting people called the Basic Income.

The survey is completely anonymous. The information collected will be treated as strictly confidential and it will not be possible to identify any individual from any published results. Please note that taking part is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. Have you any questions about the study?

Do you consent to take part in this interview and so give permission for members of the research team to have access to your responses?

1. Yes [CIRCLE AND CARRY ON WITH THE INTERVIEW]
2. No [THANK THE INTERVIEWEE FOR THEIR TIME]

Q1 Thinking of the current system of welfare and benefits in the UK, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the system works well for people who need support?

Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	(Don't know)
1	2	3	4	5	8

Q2 Thinking of the current system of welfare and benefits in the UK, to what extent do you agree or disagree that the system works well for the country as a whole?

Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	(Don't know)
1	2	3	4	5	8

[SHOW CARD] Now I would like to give you a bit of information about a different way of supporting people called Basic Income. I can read out the card to you, or you can read yourself, which would you prefer?

Just to check, is it clear what I am talking about? [GO OVER CARD AGAIN IF NOT CLEAR]

Question 3. Now, I'd like you to imagine that you get to set what you think the basic income should be in the UK. Remember that this would be an amount of money that every adult would get, including pensioners. No-one would pay tax on it and that any earnings from work would go on top of it. So if you fall on hard times and couldn't get money any other way, this would be what would cover your costs of living like food, housing, clothes and lifestyle.

I'd like you to indicate on this scale what the basic income should be.

If unsure: How much would you need a week to live on at a minimum?

*this income is guaranteed whether a person works or not. Housing costs would be covered by a basic housing income set by area. There would be a universal child benefit to support those with children. There would also be additional support for people who were disabled.

Don't know

Per week	Per month	Per year
>£310	>£1,330	More than £16,000
£310	£1,330	£16,000
£290	£1,250	£15,000
£270	£1,170	£14,000
£250	£1,080	£13,000
£230	£1,000	£12,000
£210	£920	£11,000
£190	£830	£10,000
£170	£750	£9,000
£150	£670	£8,000
£135	£580	£7,000
£115	£500	£6,000
£100	£420	£5,000
£75	£330	£4,000
£60	£250	£3,000
£40	£160	£2,000
£20	£80	£1,000
£0	£0	£0

Question 4. When you were thinking on how much the basic income should be, were you thinking about supporting:

1. An individual, for example you yourself
2. Two people, for example you and a partner
3. A family, for example you and your family

Now imagine that you don't currently have a paid job and are in a position to look for full-time work. You are getting a basic income that pays your housing costs, and leaves you with £100 a week to cover food, clothing, hobbies and so on for yourself.

Question 5. A job comes up, and after tax you would get an extra £150 a week, remembering that you would still get your basic income of £100 (after housing costs). You would have to travel a bit to get there and the work doesn't really interest you. It's full time and you would have no say over the shifts you work or how you work. Would you take it if there was no other jobs going?

Yes No Don't know

Question 6. Another job comes up paying the same, £150 a week after tax, and you would still get your basic income of £100 after housing costs. The job is in a local small business and you are interested in the work they do. It's full time but they are flexible about when and how you work. Would you take it if there were no other jobs going?

Yes No Don't know

Question 7. You didn't get those jobs but a voluntary position comes up in a charity, doing work that is worthwhile and interests you. You would be working with others and would have a big say in what you were doing. It would mean going in five days a week with no pay apart from your basic income of £100 a week after housing costs. Would you do it?

Yes No Don't know

Thinking of the idea of a basic income overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree that

		Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	(Don't know)
Q8	A basic income should be introduced for every UK citizen	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q9	Many people would just sit around and do nothing if they got a basic income	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q10	A basic income should only be brought in if there are strict rules about who can get it	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q11	People would do more voluntary or unwaged work if they got a basic income	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q12	A basic income would cost the country too much	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q13	A basic income would help businesses find temporary and flexible workers	1	2	3	4	5	8

One idea is to introduce the basic income for groups of people who often struggle with low incomes. Would you agree or disagree to a basic income being brought in for these groups of people:

		Agree strongly	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Disagree strongly	(Don't know)
Q14	Pensioners, to replace the state pension	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q15	Young People aged 18 to 25, to support them getting training and education	1	2	3	4	5	8
Q16	People near retirement age (e.g. 55 to 65) to support part-time employment	1	2	3	4	5	8

Question 17. What is your age?

Under 21	21 to 30	31 to 45	46 to 65	over 65	Prefer not to say
1	2	3	4	5	8

Question 18. About you yourself, you don't have to answer this, but would you describe yourself as:

- a. in paid employment
- b. student
- c. retired
- d. disabled/ill
- e. housewife/househusband
- f. unemployed
- g. other
.....
- h. prefer not to say

Question 19. Have you gained an undergraduate level qualification or higher?

Yes No Prefer not to say

Question 20. [GENDER, DO NOT ASK]

Male Female

Question 21. During the last five years, have you or anyone in your household claimed for support, benefits or welfare, like Income Support, Pension Credit or Working Families Tax Credit? You don't have answer if you prefer not to.

Yes No Prefer not to say

Question 22. Would you like to know more about the finished research?
[EMAIL IF SO]

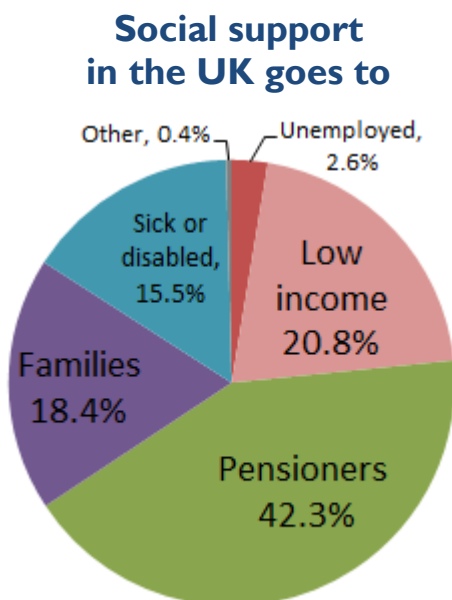
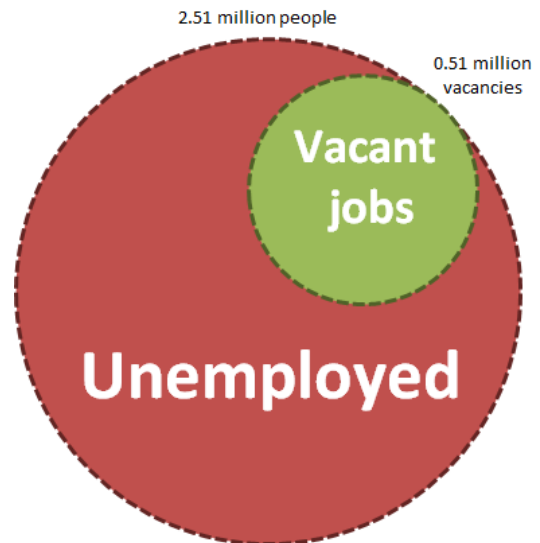
Question 23. Would you like to be on the Sheffield Equality Group emailing list?
Yes (ADD EMAIL ABOVE) No

Thanks very much for your time, please have this booklet with information about this study and the basic income.

[PLEASE GIVE PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION BOOKLET ABOUT THE STUDY]

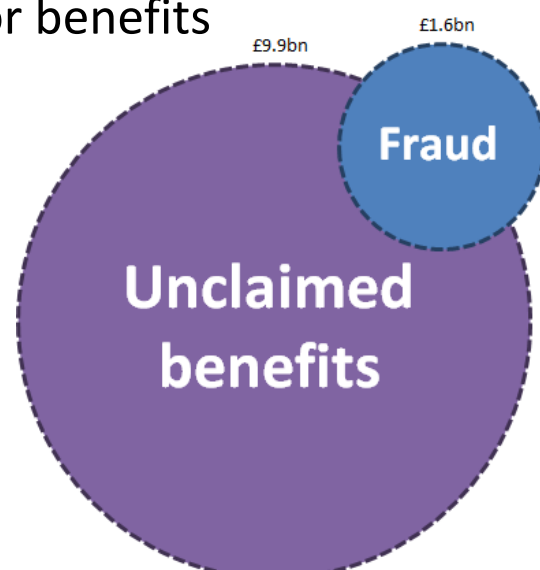
[BASIC INCOME CARD]

At the moment **8** out of every **100** people of working age are unemployed. There are more unemployed people than there are jobs. Unemployment can hit families hard, storing up problems for the future.



- **71** out of every **100** people eligible to work do have a job*
- **1** in **5** workers are low paid, often in temporary or flexible work
- **One fifth** of the government spending on social support goes to support people in low-paid jobs so they can get by

The amount of fraudulent claims for benefits is small compared to unclaimed benefits. A lot of people don't get the money they are entitled to because it is difficult or they don't want to. Because there are delays and mistakes in giving out benefits, people get into difficulty.



*the rest are housewives/househusband (6 people out of every 100), students (6 people), sick or disabled (6 people) or early retirees (4 people)

One proposal to simply support people in or out of work is to have a **basic income** or citizens' income*.

A basic income is a level of income that is a minimum income below which nobody can fall. **Every adult** would get this income and it would provide a **guaranteed safety net**. You would pay no tax on this basic income, but everyone would pay tax on income they earn over this basic income. So **work will always leave you better off** and **everyone will get the same support**.



The basic income would make the tax and benefit system more simple. Taxes would be collected, with those who could afford it paying more, and shared back out to everyone. Because everyone would get a basic income, it would be much **simpler to run**, saving everyone money.

*this income is guaranteed whether a person works or not. Housing costs would be covered by a basic housing income set by area. There would be a universal child benefit to support those with children. There would also be additional support for people who were disabled.