



Better Benefits

Principles that disabled people and others think should shape the welfare system

Author: Simon Duffy

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Summary

There has been concern that many disabled people are opposed to the idea of Basic Income.

The concept of Basic Income Plus was designed to address legitimate concerns of disabled people and to help to mobilise support for a radical redesign of the welfare system.

In order to discover whether disabled people were opposed to the idea of Basic Income Citizen Network carried out a survey of people's opinions of the principles that should underpin the welfare system.

The results of the survey suggest that there is no reason to think that disabled people would be opposed to Basic Income Plus and there is evidence that they might be supportive.

The survey also revealed different levels of support for different ethical principles. The arguments for economic security were the most attractive and the argument from human rights was the least attractive.

The survey also suggested that there were a number of paradoxes in people's opinions. For example, relatively high support for conditionality did not seem to tally with people's views that sanctions had limited benefit in practice. The results suggests that work would be necessary to make clear the logic of any new system.

There is a strong case for greater work to explore the ethical principles behind Basic Income in order to build greater support and to counter negative views that may actually conflict with the principles people hold, but whose implications may not have been fully thought through.

Foreword

by Dr Elliott Johnson

Vice Chancellor's Fellow in Public Policy, Northumbria University

The Common Sense Policy Group

The Government's recent Green Paper on health- and disability-related welfare reforms returns the political discourse to an approach that has repeatedly failed over the last few decades. Cutting benefits gives the Government a budgetary saving that can be modelled by bodies such as the Office for Budget Responsibility, even when the proposed savings never come to pass – a recurring outcome from every single attempt to cut budgets in this way.

The Government's proposed right to try work without being reassessed for recipients of health- and disability- related benefits is a step in the right direction, within planned reforms that will otherwise largely prove harmful for wellbeing and the public purse. But this report adds to a growing body of evidence that the policy device of benefits cuts no longer draws public support in the way it did as a 2010s vote winner.

Why?

Well, since 2020, a much, much larger proportion of the population has experienced what it's like to lose security and to face risk of destitution. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that even high earners in previously secure roles could lose that financial security overnight. Employees who weren't already made redundant but for whom there were no actual work tasks available were left with an unprecedentedly generous form of welfare support, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (Furlough), with the Government subsidising 80% of salary up to £2,500 per month. So while on the one hand, effectively 8 million jobs were nationalised at the peak of the pandemic, on the other, employees who lost their jobs had to turn to Universal Credit, receiving a standard rate for a single person over 25 of less than one sixth of the Furlough limit, albeit with other payments to cover, for example, children and housing.

Furlough, it should be noted, was a policy that paid people not to work in contrast to Basic Income Plus, which removes perverse incentives for inactivity. And yet such a large-scale and generous support scheme was deemed successful by a large majority of the British public in 2021, particularly among 2019 Conservative voters.

This new report demonstrates the importance of narrative in translating support for Furlough to policies like Basic Income Plus. There isn't the disconnect between outcomes and the means of achieving them that we might imagine. Although a moral lens is revealing, the report is also informed by recognition that people are now exposed to risks they never previously imagined. In narratives, speaking to particular features like security and efficiency is essential.

Our work as the Common Sense Policy Group has shown that this is crucial both nationally and in 'Red Wall', post-industrial electoral constituencies where people face heightened risks to their security. Politicians, charities and researchers would be well advised to read this report and understand that speaking to people's interests when talking about policy, even when they may not fit with their own lived experience, is essential for moral and instrumental reasons.

Background

Citizen Network is an organisation committed to creating a world where everyone matters. It has strongly supported the idea of Basic Income as a new kind of economic system that will ensure everyone has enough to live on and which will enable us to rebalance our lives to take more care of ourselves, each other and the planet. Citizen Network co-founded the UBI Lab Network and is a partner with the Basic Income Research Group (BIRG).

Citizen Network is also strongly committed to the rights and interests of disabled people and other groups facing disadvantage, marginalisation and exclusion. Citizen Network believes that societies must not only aim to include everyone but also that disabled people are people with gifts and that a society that excludes them is also a society that fails to fulfil its own potential.

However, there has been significant fear and resistance to the idea of Basic Income within some communities of disabled people and disability organisations (DPAC, 2019). In addition, the possible impact of Basic Income on disabled people has not been widely explored in the academic literature (Johnson et al. 2023). Although many advocates of Basic Income make reference to the need for additional elements in a prospective system, little attention has been paid to the issue in detail (Duffy & Elder-Woodward, 2019). This may give the impression that the needs of disabled people are not worthy of the same attention as those of others people. This is wrong.

Moreover, in practice disability benefits are often complex and woven into the welfare system in ways that cannot just be treated as a supplement to Basic Income. For example, the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was a disability benefit introduced in 2008 to replace the previous Incapacity Benefit (IB). Its purpose is to meet basic living costs, but also to include a very modest additional level of income above the level of the benefits available to non-disabled people (Benstead, 2019). In fact the UK system is incredibly complex, with rules that have been changed frequently. In this changing system, your health and disability status, which is also subject to changing assessment regimes, will have a profound impact on your ability to receive limited financial support. So the introduction of a Basic Income system would inevitably have a profound impact on the benefits received by disabled people. This means also means it is not possible to create a universal welfare system without reforming the disability benefits system. This means disabled people must be involved in designing a better replacement system.

For these reasons it is not surprising that many disabled people are concerned about any proposed changes to the disability benefits system. Since 2010, in the UK, there have been sweeping changes to the whole benefit system and these changes have been introduced with little consultation and without the support of the disability movement (Duffy, 2013).

This has even continued after the election of the Labour Government in 2024. Given the frequent and extreme negative experiences among disabled people resulting from these 'welfare reforms' in recent years, it is not surprising that many disabled people are sceptical of a policy proposal that has not been designed by them or even with them in mind (Saffer et al. 2018).

For these reasons disabled people and their allies who are supportive of Basic Income have started to address these problems by defining the concept of Basic Income Plus (BI+) (Richardson & Duffy, 2020). This model implies that we can combine Basic Income with distinct additional elements to meet extra needs. Importantly these extra elements would also be designed to work in the same spirit of Basic Income (Elder-Woodward & Duffy, 2018). These needs can be identified, costed and an appropriate additional supplement assigned on top of the Basic Income. These needs do not need to be limited to the additional costs caused by an impairment, they may reflect diminished ability to earn, the extra costs of being single or of being a carer.

An additional benefit to this Basic Income Plus model is that it can potentially offer a more workable alternative to current systems of income security. Some advocates of Basic Income argue for an implementation strategy which amounts to giving everyone a very small payment and growing this universal element gradually over time (Torry, 2016). This has the disadvantage of ignoring all the negative features of the residual benefit system, disadvantages which often harm disabled people in particular. However, a Basic Income Plus model can be used to start reforms by addressing the needs of those who face the greatest disadvantage, introducing change to the whole of someone's benefit income, not just one small element. This could strip away both sanctions and means-testing for many disabled people without introducing any significant new costs.

Putting aside the merits or otherwise of the Basic Income Plus model, the concern about how disabled people perceive Basic Income has become an important strategic barrier to progress. Currently the government in the UK continues to promote an economic model that prioritises paid work, any paid work, as the only way to improve society. It resists Basic Income and does not value, care or any other forms of citizen contribution. In this context any perceived resistance by disabled people to the idea of Basic Income can be used by government as a reason not to embrace progressive reform.

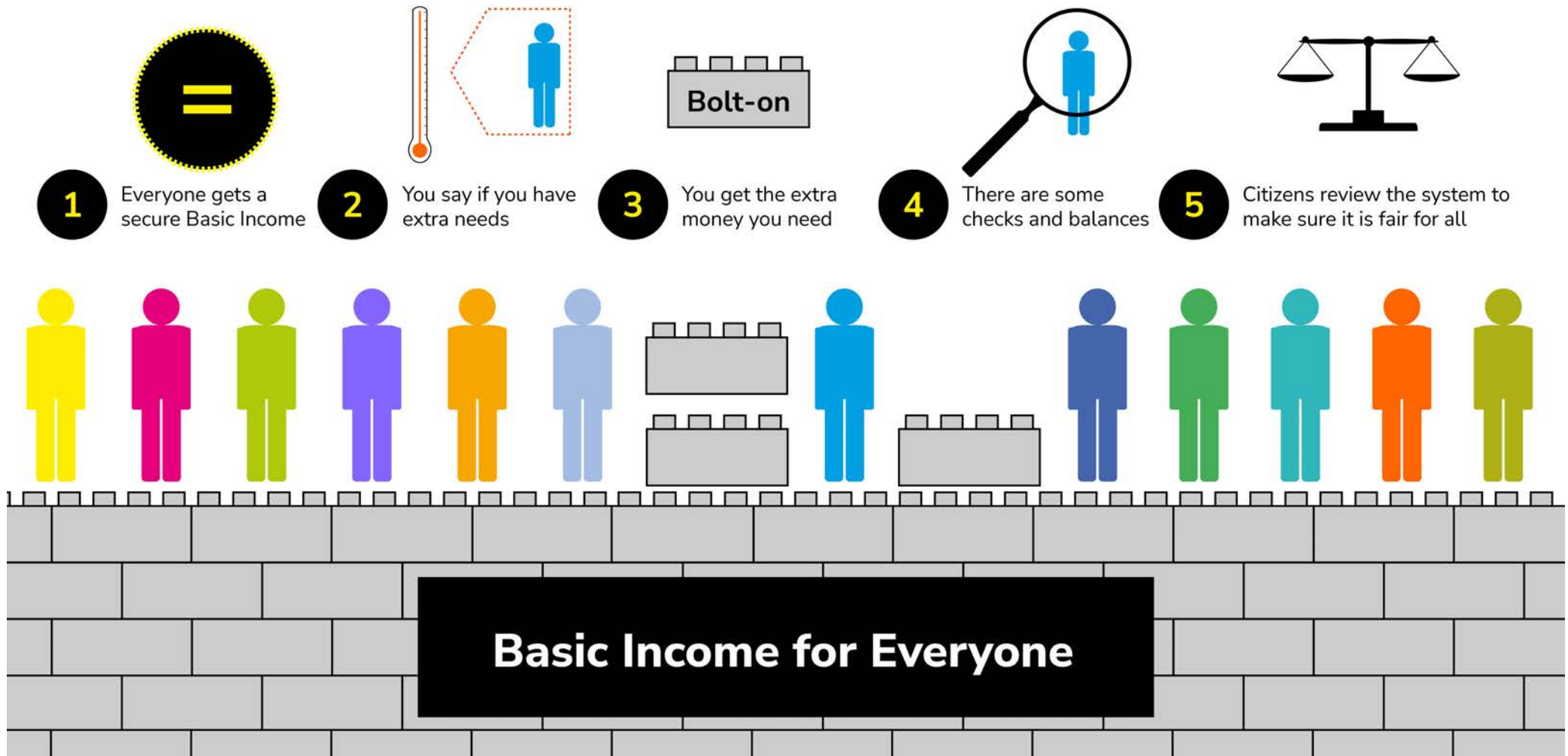
However there is a critical question to address: Do disabled people really oppose Basic Income?

Although there have been some negative views of Basic Income expressed by some prominent disability campaigners there has been little primary research to examine disabled people's support or opposition to Basic Income. In particular, it is not clear whether most people know what Basic Income is and there is certainly very little awareness of a concept like Basic Income Plus. Also, although there have been many interesting research projects to explore the general population's opinion of Basic Income, results often seem dependent on the framing of the concept (CSPG, 2024). It is also clear that some of the documented resistance to Basic Income among some disabled people is rooted in a very specific ideological position that is not widely held by disabled people (Clifford & Dunk, 2020). Given the limited publicly available evidence and policy positions, it is possible that the idea that disabled people are opposed to Basic Income might be being confused with resistance that comes from a very particular perspective. Also, there is a risk that, especially within some disability communities, the concept of Basic Income has thereby become stigmatised.

An alternative methodology is not to ask people their opinion about Basic Income directly, which assumes that people already know and understand what is meant by that term, but to instead ask them what they think about the underlying moral principles that should underpin any welfare system. In other words, to start from first principles and ask people what they think is the right way to organise a benefit system. Perhaps many people hold beliefs that are highly congruent with Basic Income, even if they are unfamiliar with or even have negative views of it as a discrete concept. Alternatively many people may hold strong views that are logically inconsistent with Basic Income or Basic Income Plus.

This paper describes research undertaken and published by Citizen Network to explore the question of what principles disabled people and other people hold about the benefit system and to see whether this demonstrates support or resistance to the idea of Basic Income and Basic Income Plus.

Basic Income Plus: everyone gets enough



Graphic: Basic Income Plus model

Principles underpinning Basic Income

In social science it is common for researchers to evaluate social policies in terms of some social goal. Often that goal is defined as utilitarian or some kind of proxy for utility (e.g. GDP), however other kinds of social goals are possible. For example policies can be evaluated by egalitarian goals, such as income or wealth equality. Much of the research on Basic Income identifies social benefits in this way, for example, its positive impact on reducing poverty (Reed H et al. 2022). Broadly we might treat all of these approaches as teleological—concerned with the *end* that the policy achieves.

However this is not the only way to evaluate a social policy. We also have strongly held intuitions about what is right or wrong as a matter of principle. For example, if we think that people have certain human rights then this means that human beings should act, or should refrain from acting, in certain particular ways. From this perspective it is more important to start with what is right than to concern ourselves with some end that we hope our actions will achieve. So it is also possible to argue for Basic Income from a human rights perspective (Lyons, 2019).

Arguably both perspectives are necessary, for our moral understanding encompasses both our own immediate actions and the consequences of our actions, and any attempt to give one perspective dominance over others may not be coherent (Duffy, 2001). However it is certainly the case that at the level of political debate and persuasion principles do matter.

Although academic arguments are often teleological the day-to-day arguments of politicians are much more likely to be deontological. Politicians will stress rights, duties and the moral choices that people make. When the Prime Minister talks about a “sick note culture” the stress is placed on the dangers of entitlements and the untrustworthiness of citizens (Johnson et al. 2024). So, if we want to understand people’s positive or negative attitude to Basic Income we need to understand more than their direct opinion about the concept (if they have any view at all). It is perhaps more important to understand the basic principles they hold about social justice and their view of human nature.

It turns out that this also means identifying the different moral principles that underpin the case for Basic Income. For Basic Income is a relatively complex social policy, proposing some distinct, but connected features, for a better benefit system. For Citizen Network these features are defined as follows:

1. **Universal** - A Basic Income should be paid to everyone, regardless of their income.
2. **Automatic** - This should be paid automatically, for example weekly or monthly.
3. **Unconditional** - The person should not be subject to sanctions, monitoring or control in order to receive that income.

4. **Individual** - The income should be paid regardless of the income of a partner or other household member.
5. **Sufficient** - The income should be sufficient to enable participation as an equal citizen in the life of the community.

Underlying these principles are various moral principles and other assumptions about the way human beings behave and what creates the best framework of incentives for human behaviour. For example, advocates of Basic Income make an assumption that security of income is very important and this tends to support both the need for regularity of payment and for unconditionality.

However, even within the movement for Basic Income there are disagreements of emphasis and even of definition. In particular the fifth principle of sufficiency is particularly contested (BIEN, 2025). For some, the ideal system is the simplest system, and this could mean one payment rate for the whole population, or perhaps a rate that only varies by some very clear and objective factor, like age. Clearly simplicity is easier to achieve if you do not set sufficiency as the goal for the system, but instead assume that some different system will be used in order to pick up any extra income people need to reflect their actual needs. For it is obvious that needs are variable and that a system aiming to meet needs will also need to adjust for that variability. Moreover what is deemed sufficient income will depend on what kind of basic public goods are provided in other ways. For example in the UK healthcare is a Universal Public Service provided by the NHS, and so nobody needs an income for healthcare. However housing is an increasingly expensive system, and costs vary dependent upon location and circumstance. It is certainly arguable that housing costs should not be included within a Basic Income system.

Certainly, if our goal is to reform the whole welfare system, not just supplement it with a modest Basic Income, then the goal of sufficiency will be much more important and extreme simplicity will be impossible. This is certainly the assumption of advocates of Basic Income Plus, who seek to replace the whole benefit system with a system built on a bedrock of Basic Income but where additional elements are seen as an integral part of the whole system. For advocates of Basic income Plus there are several factors that may demand sensitivity to particular needs:

1. **Age** - It is commonly assumed that needs change with age and systems of child benefit or pension treat age as an important factor in social security. We may want to vary the system in accordance with age because costs vary with age or because of other factors, like the ability to earn. In the case of children there is often an assumption that children can rely on a pre-existing household and so some costs are taken out of consideration.
2. **Health** - People who are sick, particularly people who are sick for long periods or with high levels of regularity, will have different needs, extra costs and reduced ability to earn income.

3. **Impairment** - People who have physical or mental impairments will also have different needs or extra costs and some may have a reduced ability to earn income. It is important to note that the earning potential of a disabled person is likely to vary significantly and there are many disabled people able to earn money on the same terms as non-disabled people.
4. **Caring** - People who have to take responsibility of adults or children who need care or support face extra costs and increased barriers to earning extra income. The current system of Carer's Allowance is meant to address some of the extra costs, but it is in fact a very low benefit and it is subject to a very high level of means-testing.
5. **Household** - People who live alone face higher costs per person than those who share a home with others.
6. **Location** - People who live in more expensive locations face higher costs than others.

Of course there are significant questions as to what degree the welfare system should be sensitive to any of these factor. For example, allocating more resources to people living in more expensive locations may seem to exacerbate underlying geographic inequalities. However systems do tend to reflect these needs, to some degree, at least in recognition that some of these factors certainly make earning an income much more difficult.

So, in summary, Citizen Network designed a survey tool in order to explore people's attitudes to the whole benefit system, not just to Basic Income. To be clear, the goal was to define competing ethical principles that might underpin different possible welfare systems. However, given Citizen Network's advocacy for Basic Income Plus, there is likely to have been some subjectivity bias and a different framing of the issues might open up new potential principles for examination. However, as we will see, the ethical principles described did make sense to many people and we discovered that people held different views and some very interesting patterns emerged.

The Better Benefits Survey

The research began by creating a survey of opinions to distinguish the core ethical questions that might shape an income security system. The survey design tried to specify the underlying ethical questions in a way that was balanced and where distinct ethical positions were expressed in a way that their adherents would recognise and support. The goal was to avoid a pejorative framing of any point of view. Whether this was adequately achieved is certainly open to debate. Out of the 1058 people who completed the survey three people did say that they felt that there should have been some different kind of option for some of the questions—however, when asked, none of them specified what such an option would be.

Once the survey was designed it was shared as widely as possible, but particularly targeting disabled people and their allies. Primarily the survey was shared by Citizen Network and allied organisations using social media. Citizen Network is a Sheffield-based organisation with a global membership and strong commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. It is certain that this will have heavily skewed who would have completed the survey. Certainly the data will not accurately reflect the balance of views held in the community as a whole. Nevertheless, interesting and revealing patterns are revealed.

The survey ran from May to August 2019 and 1103 people started to respond, and there was a 96% completion rate. The survey was completed by people from 23 different countries, but the vast majority of the responses were from the UK (83%) with Australia (6%) and the USA (3%) a long way behind. On average the survey took 4:37 minutes to complete. Overall, as Table 1 shows, the group surveyed was skewed towards people aged between 36 and 64 (72%).

Age	Number	Percentage
Under 18	3	0%
18 to 35	110	10%
36 to 64	761	72%
65 or over	184	17%
Total	1058	

TABLE 1 - AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Interestingly the sample was also skewed towards women (62%) as we see in Table 2.

Gender	Number	Percentage
Female	657	62%
Male	385	36%
Other	16	2%
Total	1058	

TABLE 2 - GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

As Table 3 shows the group seems to be skewed towards people with no faith (60%), either people with no religious affiliation (44%) or defining people defining themselves as atheists or agnostics (16%). There was a large group of Christians (32%) and low representation from people of other faiths.

Religion	Number	Percentage
Christianity	340	32%
Judaism	11	1%
Islam	3	0%
Buddhism	45	4%
Hinduism	5	0%
Chinese traditional religion	1	0%
Another religion	20	2%
No religion	470	44%
Atheism or Agnostic	170	16%
TOTAL	1065	

TABLE 3 - RELIGION OF RESPONDENTS

As Table 4 shows the sample was also skewed towards disabled people. Almost half the sample were people who described themselves as having a disability or a serious health problem. There was also a significant group of people who said that they had a disabled person in their family (22%).

Do you have a disability or serious health problem?		
YES	473	45%
NO - But family member does	235	22%
NO	348	33%
Total	1056	

TABLE 4 - DISABILITY OF RESPONDENTS

Primary findings

The precise questions and their responses are set out in the series of tables below. The questions, all relate to the definition of the Basic Income Plus in some way. But the questions do not just offer people a reason to support such a system, they also offer people a reason to oppose such a system, or to express uncertainty or ambivalence about either of the more definitive responses.

The objective was to articulate reasons for supporting or opposing some aspect of Basic Income Plus. But it was important to ensure that the principle consistent with Basic Income Plus was not always the principle that required a positive response. Sometimes the principles that under Basic Income Plus required a negative response. The language and framing aimed to be respectful to opposing moral perspectives.

It is important to repeat that the sampling process means that these results should not be treated as any kind of measurement of the balance of opinions across the whole of society. The sample is certainly not perfectly random. However this does not make the findings meaningless. For the data helps us to understand at least five different things:

1. Whether these ethical principles are held by some people.
2. Whether there are people who cannot identify with either of the opposing principles.
3. What principles are more or less attractive within the sample.
4. Whether people holding one principle are more likely to agree with another principle.
5. Whether some principles correlate to other objective facts about the respondents.

Q1 Poverty

The first question explores whether people think that poverty is an inevitable fact of life or whether it was something that society can eradicate. This question seems like it should be a foundational question for any system of Basic Income, although clearly other welfare systems may aim to end or reduce poverty. In the sample only a small number of people treated poverty as an unfortunate but an inevitable fact (4%). A very large majority of the sample thought of poverty as something that could be eliminated (78%).

Q1 Do you think poverty is inevitable? (n = 1098)		
Yes	Poverty may be unfortunate, but it is inevitable.	4%
Not sure	We should try to reduce poverty as much as we can.	17%
No	We need to make sure nobody lives in poverty.	78%

TABLE 5 - RESPONSES TO Q1

There is no exploration here of what poverty precisely means and this may be an important factor. Poverty will seem much more intractable if you view poverty as a function of relative inequality, whereas if you believe that poverty is a reasonably definable property, then you may be more likely think that poverty can be eradicated.

Q2 Government

Of course a welfare system does not necessarily aim at eradicating poverty; its role may be to merely reduce poverty, to exercise social control or to minimise the threat of social breakdown. Even someone who does not care about social justice may value an income security system that reduces the risk of crime, violence or revolution. So it is perhaps not surprising that almost everyone in the sample believed that governments should use taxes and benefits (ie. the welfare system) to reduce poverty (94%).

Q2 Should the government use tax and benefits to reduce poverty? (n = 1096)		
Yes	Government should redistribute resources to reduce poverty	94%
Not sure	Benefits may be necessary, but they should be kept as low as possible	3%
No	It is not government's job to make some people poorer and others richer	2%

TABLE 6 - RESPONSES TO Q2

For this sample the support for a hardline opposition to any income redistribution was extremely low (2%) and only a similar small group supported the idea that benefits should be as low as possible (3%). The vast majority of respondents do not support principles that are quite commonly expressed by some politicians and opinion formers, but this perhaps only underlines the fact that this sample is not representative and clearly has a positive bias towards social justice.

Q3 Targeting

The idea that benefits should be targeted is of course rather imprecise, however the options draw a line between the idea that the welfare system might serve only some people or whether it should be designed to serve everyone. Clearly the universality of Basic Income is one of its most important defining features, whereas the language of targeting resources on the poorest or the most disabled is a common trope in political discourse.

Q3 Should benefits just be targeted on those most in need? (n = 1096)		
Yes	Only people who are truly poor should get benefits	9%
Not sure	Not everybody needs benefits	20%
No	The best system is one where everyone gets support	71%

TABLE 7 - RESPONSES TO Q3

This question begins in a broad way to articulate one of the arguments for a Basic Income system that it should support everyone (71%). Those who would like to restrict benefits to the truly poor (9%) are unlikely to support the idea of Basic Income. Clearly people who do not believe everyone needs benefits (20%) would not necessarily be opponents of Basic Income, for Basic Income assumes that even people who do not need benefits should still get a Basic Income, but that they may also be paying taxes that offset their Basic Income.

Q4 Means-testing

The fourth question pursues the matter of universality further. This was one of the hardest questions to frame objectively. One of the fundamental features of Basic Income, but one that requires a little more unpacking is that a system that provides everyone with a Basic Income is not just universal in the obvious sense of giving everybody something, it also eradicates a typical feature of many income security systems—means-testing. To be more precise, the Basic Income itself is not means-tested. Other taxes, including forms of income tax, may continue to exist, but they would only apply to income over and above the Basic Income.

The paradox of a means-tested benefits system is that it effectively taxes the poorest at a very high rate of tax (sometimes called the marginal rate of tax). In fact means-tested systems tend to create marginal tax rates that are higher for the poorest than the tax rates for the rich. This fact means that those who have a very negative view of tax (often supporters of more liberal conceptions of society) may be more sensitive to arguments that recognise the objective fact that the only way to reduce the level of means-testing for the poorest is to make the benefit system increasingly universal. For this reason means-testing was articulated in terms of ‘coming off benefits’ which is a more positive way of positively describing the case for a system where benefit recipients face the highest marginal tax rates.

Q4 Should people pay back their benefits as soon as possible? (This is called means-testing or taxing.) (n = 1094)		
Yes	People should come off benefits as soon as possible, even if this means they pay high rates of tax	2%
Not sure	Maybe some benefits should be means-tested, but others should not be	22%
No	People on benefits and low incomes should always pay a lower rate of tax than the better-off	75%

TABLE 8 - RESPONSES TO Q4

Despite my attempt to make high means-testing seem reasonable support for this principle was very low (2%). However support for a kind of mixed position (which is certainly how the UK benefit system works) was significant (22%). The vast majority of support was for a system that was genuinely progressive and where marginal tax rates increased with income (75%).

Q5 Family

Another important feature of Basic Income is that it creates individual entitlements and it rejects the idea that the welfare should be built around households and that members of the household should be dependent on the income of the primary income earner, quite often a man. In many respects this is the most dramatic change that would be introduced by any Basic Income system.

It is also worth observing that the UK tax system has been increasingly organised into a system of individual entitlements and obligations, whereas the benefit system remains firmly organised on a system that treats families as a benefit unit:

“A benefit unit is defined to be a single adult or a married or cohabiting couple and any dependent children; since January 2006 same-sex partners (civil partners and cohabitees) have been included in the same benefit unit.” (DWP, 2012)

The net effect of both systems is to disadvantage families where one partner is not in employed work, perhaps because they have caring responsibilities, and to create extreme economic dependency for partners, typical women, who have no independent income.

Q5 Should family members depend on the income of the main earner? (n = 1096)		
Yes	Families must look after each other even if that means only one person receives an income	5%
Not sure	Maybe some people in a family do need an independent income	20%
No	Everybody must have their own money and must be able to live independently if they want to	76%

TABLE 9 - RESPONSES TO Q5

Support for a system that allows complete reliance on one earner in the family, even when the response stresses the positive nature of family care was very low (5%). A very large group actively support the idea of economic independence for everyone (76%) with the remaining group supporting an intermediate position, but one that still recognises the importance of independent income (20%).

Q6 Income security

Another argument for a system of Basic Income is that it provides secure and regular income, combatting the growing insecurity of earned income, the lack of secure access to resources held in common or services that don't require money. In opposition to the necessity for security is the positive value of risk and the dangers of too much reliance on others.

Q6 Should people be able to rely on a secure and regular income? (n = 1098)		
Yes	A regular and secure income is better for people	95%
Not sure	Maybe a little insecurity is ok, but not too much	4%
No	It is important that people don't feel too secure	1%

TABLE 10 - RESPONSES TO Q6

Perhaps the argument for insecurity was not expressed well enough and the argument for security too broadly, but certainly a secure income was recognised with an overwhelming level of support (95%). Even accepting a little insecurity got insignificant support (4%) and almost nobody was willing to support the quite modest claim that people should not feel too secure (1%). Perhaps this suggests that income security is one of the strongest selling points of a system of Basic Income.

Q7 Conditionality

Another critical feature of any Basic Income system is that you will receive the income unconditionally, and in opposition to the workfare policies that have grown to dominate income security systems since the 1980s, this means that you do not need to be seeking work in order to get benefits (Standing, 2017).

To express the logic of the opposing position the Basic Income position was expressed in terms of freedom and an entitlement to an income whereas the opposing principle was expressed in terms of the need for people to be obedient to social norms.

Q7 Should the government check that people are looking for work? (n = 1082)		
Yes	People who get benefits need to be managed and sanctioned if they break the rules	13%
Not sure	Maybe some people need to be controlled for their own good	26%
No	People have a right to benefits and should be free to make their own decisions	60%

TABLE 11 - RESPONSES TO Q7

Unlike the argument from security, this argument from human rights received much less support (60%). A significant minority think that some of their fellow citizens need to be controlled for their own good (26%) and a small but significant group think that people should be sanctioned, which means being left with insufficient income, for not following the rules (13%). Compared to all the other potential underlying principles for Basic Income the argument that people have a fundamental right to exist and to be able to act with freedom seems to have the least support in this sample.

It is probably worth noting that some advocates of Basic Income make an important distinction about eligibility and explicitly exclude convicted criminals from receiving a Basic Income (partially because their basic needs are met in prison). Perhaps, if this exclusion had been signalled in some way, it might have changed people's perception of the human rights argument.

Q8 Sanctions

The next question is a variant of the previous one. Instead of focusing on whether it is acceptable to punish someone by taking away their income this question asks people to consider to what degree fear of such a punishment is likely to be helpful in making someone look for paid work. It is also an exploration of the earlier issue of means-testing, for the logical implication of reducing or eradicating means-testing is that you will improve work incentives for people on low incomes. Although this question could be treated as a purely empirical question it probably contains within it an underlying moral assumption about the appropriateness of controlling people with fear.

Q8 Do incentives work better than sanctions for encouraging people to find work? (n = 1082)		
Yes	If people keep most of what they earn they will be encouraged to find work	81%
Not sure	Maybe people need a mixture of positive incentives and penalties	15%
No	People are motivated most by the fear of poverty	5%

TABLE 12 - RESPONSES TO Q8

Curiously while 39% of people (Question 7) thought that it was reasonable for the state to control and punish people for failing to seek work a much lower number actually think such incentives are effective as compared to positive incentives. A small number think people are primarily motivated by fear of poverty (5%) and a larger group think positive incentives and penalties are important (15%). Against this a large majority think positive incentives are most likely to be effective (81%).

Q9 Employment

Advocates of Basic Income are themselves rather divided on the issue of paid work. In the post-war era arguments for Basic Income have gone hand in hand with the assumption that on balance economic activity that has an exchange value (paid work) is a good thing and also the Keynesian assumption that such economic activity is essential to maintain economic stability (Atkinson, 1996a).

However there are increasing numbers of people who are questioning this economic orthodoxy and wondering whether paid work is a much more uncertain good, perhaps because it can be exploitative, because so much commercial activity has negative consequences, or because it distracts people from work of genuine value or because it drives carbon emissions or has other environmentally catastrophic consequences (Boulanger, 2010).

Q9 Is paid employment the most important human activity? (n = 1097)		
Yes	Paid employment is essential to the functioning of the economy and society	7%
Not sure	There may be other important activities by paid work is the most important thing	8%
No	There are many other important human activities, like caring, creating and volunteering	85%

TABLE 13 - RESPONSES TO Q9

The responses to this question were particularly interesting given the dominant value that paid work takes in political discourse. Only a small minority thought paid work was an essential activity (7%) and only a slightly larger number thought work was the most activity (8%). A very large majority though that there were many other important activities and didn't want to give paid work priority over other important roles (85%).

This willingness to question the value of paid work again contrasts interestingly with the smaller number who supported outright unconditionality. This seems to suggest that there are people who support conditionality, but not necessarily for paid work; some of these may logically be drawn to some kind of Participation Income, where people receive a basic income, but only if they have carried out some socially valuable work (Atkinson, 1996b).

Q10 Disability

The final set of questions turned from the general case for Basic Income to the more specific issues raised by the idea of Basic Income Plus. The first of these questions is a fairly blunt exploration of whether there should be increased incomes built into the welfare system for disabled people.

Q10 Should people with disabilities get higher benefits? (n = 1098)		
Yes	Benefits should go up if people need more support in order to contribute to society	88%
Not sure	Maybe some benefits should be increased to reflect levels of disability	12%
No	Benefits should be kept simple and as low as possible	1%

TABLE 14 - RESPONSES TO Q10

What is particularly striking is that amongst this sample almost nobody felt that an income system should be as simple as possible, thereby eradicating the necessity of additional benefits or supplements to reflect disability. Some people felt that there should possibly be some benefits to reflect levels of disability (12%) and the vast majority supported a broad formulation that implies benefit income should be designed to ensure everyone can contribute to society (88%). Again it is interesting that this formulation, which stresses contribution and inclusivity gained more support than the human rights formulation of Question 7. Also if there are some advocates of a system of a welfare system that denies the rights and needs of disabled people then they are hard to find in this particular sample.

Q11 Extra costs

The next question digs a little more deeply into what kind of extra costs are legitimate. Clearly money for basics, money for housing and money for costs created directly by disability or illness are thought of as overwhelmingly legitimate (96-98%). However there was somewhat less support for things that might seem somewhat less basic (63%) or costs that are caused by living in a more expensive area (46%).

Q11 Which of these costs should be covered by the benefit system? (n = 1075)			
	Certainly	A little bit	Not at all
Money for basic food, energy and clothes	98%	2%	0%
Money to travel and participate in community life	63%	34%	3%
Money for housing	96%	4%	0%
Money for any extra costs caused by disability or illness	97%	3%	0%
Money for extra costs caused by living in an expensive area	46%	40%	14%

TABLE 15 - RESPONSES TO Q11

These findings seem pretty consistent with the idea that the needs that should demand our ethical attention are those that are essential and that any extra costs that seem to be created simply by preferences do not demand the same response. This lends weight to the idea that an objective understanding of poverty, not some merely relative conception of poverty, is likely to have much more ethical weight.

Q12 Trust

This question, and the following question, arise from considering some of the practical issues that flow from allowing more variability in the benefits that people receive to reflect disability or other factors. It is important to recognise that many of the factors we may want to consider may not be straightforwardly objective, in the way that our age is.

While some factors (e.g. age or household size) seem utterly objective, other factors, like illness, disability or caring responsibilities maybe somewhat more subjective. That doesn't mean that they are entirely subjective matters and there will some very strong indicators (e.g. use of a wheelchair or time spent carrying out personal care tasks). However there may be factors that much harder to make objective and then human judgement will becomes essential. This means we need to understand how best to make these judgements and who can be best trusted to make these judgements.

Q12 Can people be trusted to tell the truth? (n = 1069)		
Yes	People can largely be trusted to tell the truth	62%
Not sure	Maybe there needs to be some checks and follow-ups	31%
No	People need to be regularly evaluated and monitored	7%

TABLE 16 - RESPONSES TO Q12

The general rhetoric on benefits, often specifically targeted at disabled people or people with chronic or mental illness, has been remorselessly negative for decades, at least in many English-speaking countries, like the UK, USA and Australia (Johnson & Nettle, 2023a; Duffy, 2013). The fact that only a small number of people feel people can't be trusted (7%) but a larger group feel checking and follow-ups are possibly necessary (31%) may not be surprising, even when we might expect this sample to be more trusting than a more representative sample.

It is interesting that if we compare the UK tax system with the UK benefit system, while the former system, which deals with very large amounts of money, is largely trust-based and built on self-assessment, the latter is largely suspicious, building in multiple checks and external assessments (Duffy & Dalrymple, 2014). Agreeing the criteria for any entitlement and ensuring that those criteria are reasonable and meaningful would become an important task. It is certainly not clear why someone who is not the disabled person themselves is in a better position to make that judgement.

Q13 Assessment

This brings us to the question of who should assess needs. This is another interesting case where picking up the practicalities of an issue exposes a certain paradox. Although the general level of trustfulness expressed in Question 12 seems relatively modest (62%) a much larger number felt that people themselves were certainly (76%) or sometimes (22%) the right people to assess what they need. In fact it maybe that the lack of trust expressed in Question 12 does not reflect the untrustworthiness of disabled people or of other people receiving benefits, but the untrustworthiness of the professional groups who are carrying out assessments.

Q13 Who are the best people to decide what people need? (n = 1073)				
	Yes, certainly	Sometimes	Not really	No, never
People themselves	76%	22%	2%	0%
Family or friends	16%	71%	11%	2%
Doctors or nurses	23%	61%	14%	2%
Social workers or civil servants	8%	57%	26%	9%
Private businesses	0%	5%	28%	66%
Ordinary citizens or peers	10%	44%	29%	17%

TABLE 17 - RESPONSES TO Q13

The most striking result is the complete lack of trust in assessments by private business, for governments have increasingly contracted out assessments to such businesses (Burgess et al. 2014). Other professionals are generally seen as somewhat trustworthy, but neither doctors (23%) nor social workers (8%) are seen as utterly reliable.

Underlying principles

One of the primary things we can conclude from the survey is that to a large extent people found the questions meaningful and were able to distinguish between the options and form an opinion. The drop out rate was low and most people answered all the questions. If we restrict ourselves only to the ethical principles that might be used to make the case for a Basic Income system as I have defined them and we then order them by their relative levels of support we might articulate these statements as ethical principles as follows:

1. **Security** - Everyone should have a secure and regular income (95%).
2. **Redistribution** - Government should redistribute resources to reduce poverty (94%).
3. **Disability** - People with higher needs should get a higher income (88%).
4. **Contribution** - Paid work is not the only kind of valuable work (85%).
5. **Incentive** - There should be positive incentives to earn money (81%).
6. **Sufficient** - Nobody should live in poverty (78%).
7. **Independent** - Every person should have their own income (76%).
8. **Progressive** - People on lower incomes should pay lower taxes (75%).
9. **Universal** - The system should support everyone (71%).
10. **Freedom** - People should be free to decide how they live (60%).

Obviously these principles were not all intuitively obvious to all respondents. There were a significant number of people who supported the opposing principle. Moreover many people expressed support for the intermediate position. However it should be noted that the intermediate position was not really a third position, but rather a more moderate expression of opposition to the primary principle.

Although there were three complaints that the questions were biased the complainants didn't offer any alternative formulations. This problem may emerge because Basic Income is perceived as a radical welfare system, and the principles that support it can seem too categorical. It is possible to express the positive principle, and to articulate an opposing principle, but the law of the excluded middle applies, and so being forced to select or reject a principle can seem challenging. However it is certainly possible that a degree of subjective bias meant that there might have been better ways to express the opposing principle or the intermediate principle and that might have changed some of the results.

Alternatively, as we've explored above, there may be much better framings of some these questions which would have even increased support for the pro-Basic Income principle. For instance, if it is clear to people that criminal behaviour is excluded then a human rights

argument may seem stronger. Similarly, if people understand the essentially progressive nature of a Basic Income system then support for universality might increase. The mechanics of Basic Income cannot be divorced from the underlying ethical principles which support it and these principles rely on a persuasive framing to be recognised and supported.

Freedom

Now it is important to note that while all of these arguments could individually lend weight to an argument for a Basic Income system none of them are sufficient on their own. In fact you could use some of these principles to defend very different systems. A defender of a Minimum Income Guarantee programme may believe incomes should be sufficient to escape poverty, but they do not have to believe that marginal tax rates should always be progressive, as such programmes usually impose significant clawback rates on recipients (Tims & Stirling, 2022). A defender of Participation Income may believe that there are multiple forms of valuable work, but they are necessarily committed to some form of control or to sanctions to ensure that people do valued work.

Moreover it is possible that you might support Basic Income as a policy proposal, but you do not agree with all these ethical positions. There may even be people who support Basic Income for no ethical reason at all. However, when we examine the list of ethical principles, a good candidate for the belief that best predicts support for Basic Income than any other might be the last and least popular principle - the principle that people should be free to live their life free of sanctions and control. These are the people who preferred the statement “People have a right to benefits and should be free to make their own decisions” over the statements “Maybe some people need to be controlled for their own good” or “People who get benefits need to be managed and sanctioned if they break the rules.”

In Table 18 we have separated out all respondents into those who support a principle of freedom (Pro-F) and those opposed to this (Anti-F). We can then compare their views on other principles, and these are some of the more striking findings:

- Supporters of the Freedom Principle are more likely to support all the other principles than those who oppose the Freedom Principle.
- Not all supporters of the Freedom Principle support all the other principles.
- The greatest similarity in belief is for those views that generally got high levels of support, such as the Security Principle (98% vs. 91%).
- The greatest difference in belief is for those views that generally got lower levels of support, such as the Universal Principle (84% vs 51%).

Perhaps none of this is too surprising, but it offers an interesting perspective on how advocates of a Basic Income system might make their case. It seems likely that a commitment to a human rights, both the right to an income and the right to freedom, might be a distinguishing feature of Basic Income advocacy. However it is likely that the Principles of Security and Redistribution are useful bridging principles which are shared by many others. This finding also seems to align well with recent research on the framing of Basic Income in communities suffering material deprivation (Johnson et al. 2022; 2023). Perhaps

showing that Basic Income is effective at realising these principles offers a persuasive engagement strategy, even if it doesn't necessarily drive people to full support of a Basic Income system.

	Pro-F	Anti-F	D	F	N	Gross
1 Security	98	91	97	94	95	95
2 Redistribution	98	89	95	95	94	94
3 Disability	92	81	91	89	84	88
4 Contribution	94	72	86	82	88	85
5 Incentive	88	70	82	77	83	81
6 Sufficient	86	67	83	76	74	78
7 Independent	84	64	78	75	75	76
8 Progressive	85	61	78	70	77	75
9 Universal	84	51	72	65	73	71
10 Freedom	100	0	61	55	64	60

TABLE 18 - PATTERNS OF SUPPORT FOR 10 PRINCIPLES

Disability

In Table 18, we have broken results down by three groups:

D = People have a disability or serious health problem (45%)

F = People who have a family member with a disability or serious health problem (22%)

N = People who are not in either category (33%)

Also the sample of respondents is skewed towards disabled people, who made up nearly half of all respondents. This is then a relatively large sample of disabled people and it allows us to identify how their views compared to the other groups. Certain interesting patterns emerge:

- Disabled people were more likely to support all of the ethical principles for Basic Income than members of a family that included a disabled person.
- Compared to the category who were not in either category (N) the pattern was more mixed with disabled people more supportive of 6 principles and less supportive of 4 principles (although the differences were all relatively small).
- Interestingly, on the Disability Principle, the advocates of the Freedom Principle were more supportive than disabled people themselves (by a small degree) whereas the Anti-F and N groups were least supportive.

Clearly this sample cannot be taken as representative of all disabled people; however it clearly suggests that there might large number of disabled people who do support the principles that underpin Basic Income and that, relatively speaking, their level of support is higher than for some other groups. This is perhaps also consistent with findings from research on support for Basic income from groups who are materially disadvantaged (Johnson et al. 2022; 2023). Disabled people are generally much more likely to be experiencing poverty and the injustices built into the current benefit system and so there are good reason to believe that will support Basic Income.

Perhaps even more significantly it is clear that the people who seem most likely to support a Basic Income system in general (Pro-F) are even more likely to seek a system that responds to the extra needs of disabled people than disabled people themselves (92% v 91%). It certainly seems highly unlikely that advocates of Basic Income will be insensitive to the needs and rights of disabled people.

Paradoxes

Finally it is worth noting that the results also reveal some of the challenges in making clear the case for a Basic Income system. For example, in responding to Question 7, 40% of respondents rejected the idea of freedom for recipients and chose options that implied people should be subject to scrutiny, control or possible sanctions; however Question 8 indicated that 81% of respondents believed that positive incentives work better than sanctions.

Also, for Question 12, only 61% of people believed that people can generally be trusted to tell the truth; however for Question 13, 76% believed that the best people to assess needs are people themselves, whereas the groups (professionals and businesses) who are often actually used by government to monitor, sanction and control were deemed much less trustworthy.

These are not direct self-contradictions, but they certainly imply ambiguities or perhaps a lack of clarity about the options available to us. If incentives are more effective than sanctions and sanctions inevitably push people into poverty then it is not clear how sanctions can be justified. If people can be trusted to assess their own needs then it is not clear why we should give power to assess or sanction to the professional groups we deem less trustworthy.

There is also ambiguity about the issue of means-testing, which is often justified on the basis of targeting resources on those with least, but has the inevitable and paradoxical effect of loading higher marginal taxes (and other kinds of handicaps like disincentives to save, marry or contribute in other ways) on to those already facing the greatest disadvantage. There may be serious limitations in our ability to unpick the logic of means-testing or targeting and see that it is simply a form of taxation. The language that is used to describe the tax-benefit system often seems to obscure its reality.

Conclusion

The limitations of the survey and the inevitable skewing of the results mean that this data cannot be treated as reliable when it comes to understanding 'what people typically think'. However, this does not make the data worthless and there are still some very interesting conclusions we can draw.

First of all, regardless of the findings, there is surely a strong case for giving more consideration to the ethical principles that underpin the logic of Basic Income. If people are persuaded of these principles, then Basic Income would seem to be a logical conclusion of these ethical principles. Alternatively, if people do not accept these principles then research findings or campaigning may simply miss the mark. Benefit systems have certainly been created for more than ethical reasons. Clearly they are also a response by the powerful to the threat of social breakdown (Fox & Cloward, 1993). However improving a system beyond whatever is deemed pragmatically necessary by the powerful is an ethical task and its ethical assumptions are fundamental.

This also opens possible strategies for persuasion. If you are an advocate of Basic Income then stressing the importance of income security maybe a good place to start. Perhaps, if someone sees that Basic Income is a good solution to ensuring income security then they may find it easier to shift their opinion on other matters and may be willing to consider that people have a human right to a sufficient income. At the very least advocates need to be aware of the range of possible arguments for Basic Income and the different kinds of opposition to Basic Income.

This data also suggests that many disabled people might be persuaded of the case for Basic Income and that in fact many disabled people could become strong advocates of Basic Income and, in particular, Basic Income Plus. More work needs to be done to open up a proper discussion of these issues and in particular, it is critical that disabled people themselves lead these discussions. Of course the views of disabled people are not defined by their impairment and it is natural that there will also be a diversity of views, as there is across the whole of society. However nothing about this data suggests that there is likely to be an inherent resistance to Basic Income Plus within the diverse disability communities.

This data also gives us some reasons to expect that many advocates of Basic Income will be very sensitive to the need to ensure that the welfare system is designed to meet the extra needs faced by disabled people (and others). It seems likely that the lack of attention to the issue of extra costs within the Basic Income community has arisen either from carelessness or a certain diffidence; perhaps an unwillingness to be drawn into discussion of something which is rightly in the domain of disabled people themselves. This data certainly gives absolutely no credence to the idea that advocates of Basic Income are heartless advocates of administrative simplicity or neoliberal extremists.

However this does raise a fundamental issue about the definition of Basic Income. Currently the tendency is to define Basic Income as only one element of a desirable system of income security rather than as a strategy for reforming the whole system. Often (but not always) it is defined as a uniform payment or as a payment that only varies with age (Reed et al. 2023). Although it is methodologically attractive to try and distinguish an innovation by the narrowest and simplest possible definition, it also risky. It can lead to people focusing unduly on some simple model rather than upon the underlying purpose of the innovation. Ultimately this puts the reform at risk in at least two ways.

If Basic Income is seen as merely a partial change of a bigger system, and one that leaves untouched many objectionable features of the bigger system, then it is not clear why key groups, like disabled people, should be interested in supporting its introduction. Secondly, if the process of reform is not connected closely to an understanding of the underlying ethical principles then it is far too easy to see the innovation implemented and interpreted in ways that are not consistent with the goals of its advocates. Too often we've seen good ideas ruined when they've been implemented in systems whose underlying culture has not shifted (Duffy, 2016).

Shifting the locus of advocacy towards Basic Income Plus could open up a very different approach. Although it may seem more challenging to question the whole welfare system (as opposed to squeezing in one new kind of benefit) ultimately it is likely to be more effective at addressing the wider systemic issues and at winning support from those groups most impacted by the poor design of the current system. Certainly, given that advocacy for change is driven largely by ethical concerns it makes more sense to follow the logic of the ethical case rather than to merely seek a narrow technical change.

Afterword

by Hannah Webster and Ruth Hannan

Co-Founders, Care Full

Increasingly, government policy feels disconnected from the ambitions of citizens in the UK. As mainstream politics lurches to the right, rhetoric about how we support and enable one another to thrive fades away.

We launched Care Full in 2024 as an attempt to offer a more hopeful story about the future. As unpaid carers in full-time work we had long felt that the solutions presented to help those with a relationship to care (unpaid carers, disabled people, care workers and more) were piecemeal and inadequate. Feeling that we needed to think bigger, bolder, more hopefully to centre care in our lives we started Care Full with a mission to create a more caring economy.

We believed that combining our policy and research professional experience with that of our lived experience presented an opportunity to challenge the status quo that mostly offered solutions in the health and social care spaces. And we felt that the problems experienced by carers were rooted in our socioeconomic model which prioritises growth and productivity over the wellbeing of citizens.

There is no single solution to this challenge of an outdated and extractive economy. We need to operate on multiple levels at once; telling new stories about the role of care, the economy and public services in our lives, designing and piloting progressive policies to enable people to live well and challenging inequalities in wealth to rebalance the future.

An important part of this is accepting that the world in 2025 is very different to the one in which our modern welfare state and economic model was born. For too long the solutions offered for those with a relationship to care are rooted in a societal model that no longer exists; with an assumption that someone (usually a woman) is able to remain in the home to care for those who may need more support due to illness or disability. But, ironically our economic model, that prioritises profit and growth, means that most adults in a household are required to be in paid work (to afford the staggering cost of living) and many families are dispersed from each other due to the need to find good paid work. An ever shrinking social security system leaves millions financially insecure and left without collective resources to support them.

In the UK, our economic model has driven us apart, whilst at the same time reducing the resources we need to enable us to care for ourselves and one another; solutions presented are sorely lacking with leave from work often unpaid, sick pay the lowest in Europe and the social care services outdated (and they have adopted the extractive economic model) and the recognition of care being part of all our lives is sadly lacking.

This picture may seem bleak but it doesn't have to be. If we explored what a future would look like, that enabled us to care for ourselves and one another, and crucially how our socioeconomic model needs to change to enable this future, then things could look very different.

There are bold ideas out there already that could shift our society to one that enables and not disables, that doesn't marginalise care but centralises it. Many of these are gaining traction; the four day week is being adopted by an increasing number of organisations, universal basic services are gaining popularity in a volatile world to ensure fuel poverty would be destined to the past, and then there's universal basic income.

With the current social security system looking like a Frankenstein's monster version of the original purposeful design we need to explore what social security for the 21st century could look like. There is an opportunity to centre Universal Basic Income (UBI) at the heart of this design. Simon's research takes the original design to the next stage; exploring what people feel about UBI Plus to demonstrate that there is a different future available to us. From it we can learn the areas where the case can more strategically be made, much of which we believe lies in the power of telling the story of a future that feels both hopeful and achievable. It requires us to centre optimism and imagination in the path forward.

The idea of centring care in socioeconomic model may seem out of reach, but it is easy to forget that a mere 100 years ago the idea of universal healthcare in the UK seemed out of reach too. And yet here we are with our universal healthcare making the nation's good health foundational to all our society. At Care Full we believe that the next foundation stone we should be laying is care; UBI presents an interesting ingredient in that foundation.

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