



Benefits system in Wales Evidence Welsh Select Committee

Closs-Davies, Sara; Gwilym, Hefin; Beck, Dave

Published: 16/09/2021

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Cyswllt i'r cyhoeddiad / Link to publication](#)

Dyfyniad o'r fersiwn a gyhoeddwyd / Citation for published version (APA):
Closs-Davies, S., Gwilym, H., & Beck, D. (2021, Sept 16). Benefits system in Wales Evidence Welsh Select Committee. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/38081/html/>

Hawliau Cyffredinol / General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)

Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)

Dave Beck (University of Salford)

Dr Sara Closs Davies is a Lecturer in Accounting at Bangor Business School, Bangor University

Dr Hefin Gwilym is a lecturer in Social Policy at Bangor University School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences

Dr Dave Beck is a lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Salford School of Health and Society

Dr's Closs-Davies, Gwilym and Beck have submitted evidence to this committee to support the call for further devolution of decision making and welfare spending within Wales and to present evidence to reduce the incidence of poverty in Wales.

Dr's Closs-Davies, Gwilym and Beck have extensive research and teaching interests in the Welsh economy, taxation, public policy, and their links to socio-inequalities. The role of poverty in Wales is a major focus for Closs-Davies, Gwilym and Beck and each have written independently about the impact of poverty in Wales.

Summary

This evidence supports the call for further devolution of powers in Wales, especially those that increase the ability for Wales to tackle poverty. Doing so, our work here evidence that the 10 years of austerity following the election of the Coalition Government of 2010 opened a chasm for rising socio-inequalities for Wales. This chasm has ensured that low-income people and communities in Wales were hit hard because of Covid-19 and during lockdown. In this evidence we call for further devolution of powers that will enable the Welsh Government to provide equitable financial stability for the people of Wales. Our evidence draws on our own primary research and is supported by a wealth of secondary research from academics, activists and civil society organisations who work on the frontline in supporting those in needs across Wales. This evidence discusses the current levels of poverty in Wales and highlights the rising incidence of food bank use as a key identifier. Moreover, the evidence also acknowledges the potential economic impact in Wales as the pandemic dust settles and discusses the attainment (and gaps) of Local Assistance Schemes, furlough, taxation, UC, and the recent £20 uplift. Finally, we end with a significant discussion of evidence surrounding the proposal for a trial of a Universal Basic Income in Wales and discuss the link between this and the Wellbeing of Future Generations in Wales.

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)

Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)

Dave Beck (University of Salford)

- **What are the key challenges for the benefits system in Wales and how do they differ from the other nations and regions of the UK?**

The key challenges to social security in Wales are to evolve a system that identifies, and addresses needs more effectively and where possible more generously. In recent years and especially since the years of austerity and particularly the Welfare Reform Act (2012), the monetary value of benefits for those in need have declined in real terms. Recently, there has also been a significant shift in public opinion regarding social security, with less support for generous benefits and more focus on the deserving/underserving debate. There seems to have been more support amongst the general public, including the Welsh public, for harsher welfare support, consistent with Neoliberal policies best exemplified in anglophone countries such as the USA and the UK. These have manifested in benefit freezes and ongoing cuts since the start of the so-called ‘years of austerity’.

Wales is different from other countries in the UK for several important reasons. Compared to England, Wales is considerably poorer with higher rates of poverty and lower rates of economic production as measured by GDP. However, Wales has similarities with the poorer regions of England, such as the Northeast and Cornwall. In many respects Wales and poorer areas of England have been neglected by the ‘Westminster bubble’ where the civil service, particularly the Treasury, have been located, leading to resentment and the flow towards decentralisation in the UK with parliaments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and city mayors in England. Scotland is different to Wales since, as a devolved state, it has considerably more powers to address the social and economic ills of our times. It is problematic for Wales that Scotland has partial competency in social security and that Northern Ireland has full control over its social security.

The Welsh Government (and local authorities) have implemented several devolved financial and in-kind support programmes which run parallel to the UK social security system which have helped support 700,000 individuals who live in poverty in Wales. These include Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Free School Meals, Education Maintenance Allowance, and Discretionary Assistance Fund. Although such schemes are welcomed by low-income individuals and families, several flaws exist within them (Bevan Foundation, 2020a): They operate independently of each other, which means individuals must navigate through multiple complex application forms and deal with contradicting eligibility criteria and means-testing for

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

each scheme; and the complexity and intensely bureaucratic nature of such schemes tend to reduce accessibility and prevent individuals from claiming (Closs-Davies et al., 2021). In addition, some claimants report inconsistent and unfair treatment by administrators who are unhelpful and unempathetic towards claimants when the latter need help with their application/renewal forms (Closs-Davies, 2021). For those who do claim, some report that the value of financial support is not always enough to meet claimants' needs. For example, the amount of Education Maintenance Allowance has remained unchanged since the mid-2000s, resulting in young people from low-income families losing out on £15 per week because of inflation (Bevan Foundation, 2020a). If the amount of financial support were to be improved, this would help young individuals improve their educational position, gain qualifications and training, resulting in potentially improving their position in the labour market, and, in turn, reducing unemployment levels in Wales, whilst also increasing income tax revenue and national insurance contributions.

To sum, the existing devolved financial and in-kind support schemes in Wales need to work in collaboration with each other, and other national programmes and administrators, to reduce the amount of multiple and complex application procedures faced by claimants. The administration of such schemes at the frontline need to be fairer, more humane and consistent, and the value of the support provided needs to be aligned with current inflation rates. These recommendations would help develop a more effective and accessible welfare benefit system in Wales.

- **Pre-pandemic, how effectively did the UK benefits system tackle poverty and socio-economic inequalities in Wales as compared to England and Scotland?**

Pre-pandemic, the UK Social Security System did not adequately address the issue of poverty in Wales. The same issues are broadly felt across all regions of the UK following the ten years of austerity. In Wales, however, the brutality of poverty has been highlighted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's Poverty in Wales Report showing that 700,000 people - or almost a quarter of the Welsh population - are living in either relative or absolute poverty (JRF, 2020).

According to the Welsh Assembly, poverty has consistently remained high during the years preceding the pandemic in Wales, from 1999/00 to 2019/20. Wales has the highest poverty rate in the UK of which children were the most likely of all age groups to be living in poverty (at 31%) (Welsh Assembly, 2021). Women and single parents were also as likely to be living in

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

poverty in Wales, according to a study carried out by Chwarae Teg (2019). The median gross weekly earnings for full-time workers in Wales in April 2020, were the lowest than other parts of the UK (except for Northern Ireland and Northeast England), further worsening in-work poverty in Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Part-time workers were likely to be earning less than the ‘living wage,’ in particular those working in the social care and food retail sectors – these being crucial industries during the pandemic.

Moreover, it is these same low-income communities who were burdened with austerity driven poverty, who - out of pure necessity - saw the rapid increase in both the numbers of food banks and attendance at these food banks (Beck and Gwilym, 2020). Pre-pandemic use of Trussell Trust Foodbanks in Wales show that between 1st April 2019 and 30th September 2019, a total of 58,272 emergency food aid parcels were donated to low-income people. This is almost equivalent to the same population of Merthyr Tydfil.

Despite the success of the Communities First programme in Wales, the most recent decade has seen ten years of ideological austerity imposed by Westminster (Beck, 2021). The current system of Universal Credit (UC) is clearly not fit for purpose and does not provide enough for recipients to live on. Case in point is the recent £20 per week uplift, encouraged due to the impact of the Coronavirus. Given that one quarter of the population of Wales are living in some form of poverty and that respective numbers across other UK nations are also at a similar, yet slightly lower, rate, the pre-pandemic system of social security is not fit for purpose, other than maintaining a certain level of poverty. The operationalisation of the UC system in Wales is at odds with the values and political ideology of the Welsh Government and unhelpful in creating a prosperous Wales (Gwilym, 2019). This is because the Treasury, dominated as it is by Neoliberals and Thatcherites, has won the battle against the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) about creating a fit-for-purpose, flexible and generous UC system. This argument was won by the former Chancellor George Osborne’s opposition to Iain Duncan Smith’s original vision for UC.

Wales is a progressive social democratic country with the first twenty years of the Welsh Government being defined by social policy above all other policy areas. Unless social security is devolved to Wales the Welsh Government will be unable to develop UC along their values and ideology. This dissonance will always be a problem for Welsh Government since it will be restricted in addressing the issue of poverty in Wales and in creating vibrant recovering

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

communities blighted by post industrialism. Blighted by disease, lack of individual motivation and a sense of entrapment in a social security that fails to help and enable.

- **How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the type and amount of support needed by people in Wales?**

As mentioned above, the impact of Covid-19 may have been assuaged (modestly) in economic terms via recognition that UC was not providing enough to individuals and families to live decently, reflected in the weekly £20 temporary increase. However, support during the pandemic cannot simply be seen through an economic lens, as health, wellbeing and income are inextricably linked. In economic terms, Covid has simply highlighted the fallibility of our current social security system, that UC simply is not a credible approach. Moreover, it has demanded that we start to think of new ways of achieving the same goal of true social security.

We agree that society at large recognised the importance of a healthy social security system. For the first time many more people become dependent upon the financial help available from benefits as people either lost employment opportunities or were placed on Furlough. It is recognised that the number of UC claimants doubled during the pandemic, highlighting that many more people, many of whom had little to no interaction with out-of-work benefits needed to rely on social security (IFS, 2021).

The pandemic has highlighted how important it is that Wales has a fit-for-purpose social security system going forward. After the pandemic dust has settled what will emerge will be a huge challenge since the hidden effects of the pandemic have been a huge rise in social problems that will eventually filter through to the social security system such as the rise in alcohol dependency, missed medical appointments, delayed treatments and surgery, distress caused by isolation and loneliness, unemployment, and mental health problems.

There is also the related issue of substantial house price inflation in Wales, exacerbated by the pandemic, as people seek new homes in rural areas and work from home. Inevitably private rental will increase, impacting on UC and household poverty. Local people will be increasingly excluded from the housing market. These problems would more likely be addressed by a Welsh Government with a social democratic perspective with control over social security than a neoliberal free market driven UK Government.

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)

Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)

Dave Beck (University of Salford)

The pandemic exacerbated poverty in Wales as it slowed down the economy and will “undoubtedly have a large negative impact on household incomes over the coming years” (IFS, 2020) as people were likely to lose their jobs and fall behind with household expenditure and debt, notwithstanding face potential serious ill-health and the risk of death. Almost half of UC claimants do not receive their full benefit payment because they are repaying debts to the DWP. Around 49% of all deductions, worth £86 million in February alone, related to paying back advanced payment caused by the five-week delay in receiving their first UC payment. Other deductions are due to paying back tax credits overpayments, court fines or other debts. Although, the DWP claim that this is acceptable practice, because advances and their repayment mean that claimants receive the correct amount they are entitled to in the long term. Campaigners are calling for the five-week wait to be scrapped because many claimants are placed in debt from the outset. According to SNP MP Chris Stephens, “This deductions policy is cutting holes in the safety net and pulling hundreds of thousands of people's incomes below subsistence levels. The only way this policy can be scrapped is if the five-week wait to receive a first payment is bridged with grants, rather than loans, and the advice of former ministers is heeded by writing off historic tax credit debt.” Andrew Forsey, Director of Feeding Britain, added that failing to bridge the five-week wait “will, sadly, add to the need for food banks.” According to Citizens Advice Cymru, (increased) debt is highly likely to become a big issue when Covid-related financial support schemes end, as it is estimated that up to £73 million of household bill arrears have built up in Wales during the pandemic (Citizens Advice, 2020): low-income families are most likely to have borrowed money during the pandemic (Bevan Foundation, 2020b).

It is noted that key workers were more likely to be earning less than the real living wage. The Bevan Foundation reports that 25% of households in Wales have faced reduced income due to the pandemic whilst living costs have increased for more than 40% of households (Bevan Foundation, 2020a). As a result, there has been a stark increase in the number of low-income individuals claiming social security support during the pandemic. According to the DWP, over 125,000 more people in Wales claimed UC in April 2021 as compared to before the pandemic: most of which during March to May 2020. Indeed, the UK government did temporarily increase the amount of UC by £20 per week but this will be wound down by the end of September 2021. In addition, almost 180,000 claims for the Welsh Government’s Discretionary Assistance Fund have been made during the year to 18 March 2021 (Welsh Government, 2021), mainly due to

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

people having stopped working or reduced their working hours, delays in receiving financial benefit support, and/or increased costs of household expenditure.

The Covid-19 pandemic has “heightened and exposed long-term issues for people in poverty” (JRF, January 2021). According to a recent study conducted by the TUC, one in four children of keyworkers - over sixty-thousand children - in Wales are living in poverty during the Covid-19 pandemic (TUC, 2021). Wales being the highest figure of child poverty in the UK as a whole and is 40% higher than the best performing region in the UK (the East of England). Although welfare is not devolved to Wales, the Welsh Government does have the power to implement emergency financial support (through, for example, its Discretionary Assistance Fund). However, the fund has not been effectively advertised and has strict eligibility criteria which means many eligible people have not been able to access it. According to Wales TUC General Secretary, Shavanah Taj, the Welsh Government needs to “tackle insecure work, expand access to its emergency financial support schemes” and reform and strengthen its financial support programmes.

- **How effectively has the UK benefits system responded to these needs, and what else should the UK Government do to deliver the right support in Wales?**

As argued above, the UK social security system is driven by Neoliberal ideology and a hostility to adequate support systems informed by a fear of benefit dependency and adherence to the underclass hypothesis as exemplified by George Osborne’s ‘shirkers and strivers’ remark, and comments by some UK government ministers praising food banks as a sign of success without recognising social and human rights to adequate food provision and housing. This is in a climate of a retrenched welfare state and its shocking failure to address *want* as originally envisaged by Beveridge. We believe that it is unlikely that the UK Government will change its policies and values regarding welfare and particularly social security in the foreseeable future. Indeed, our fear is that once the pandemic is over the UK Government will return to hard austerity policy with even further cuts to social security spending. This would add to Wales’ problems with poverty and strengthens the case for the devolution of socials security to the Welsh Government.

In response to the rising need of social security support, the introduction of the £20 uplift to UC has been a salvation for many and the proposed removal of this needs to be stopped. This is only the case for those who received this lifesaving additional payment, as many were not

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

entitled to this £20 increase (IFS, 2021). Similarly, the Job Retention Scheme (Furlough) had mixed responses. For those with recent history of employment, employers were able to apply for Furlough at 80% of normal wage levels. However, for those employed in the ‘gig economy’ or on zero-hour contracts, the mental health and economic turmoil may have been devastating.

According to Citizens Advice “The number of employees has fallen by 740,000 since the start of the crisis, and the number of people claiming out-of-work benefits has skyrocketed to 2.6 million - the highest level in over 25 years.” (Citizens Advice, 2021). Nearly two-and-a half million UC claimants are looking for work – a number that is likely to significantly grow once the Furlough scheme ends at the end of September. Although the UK Government has implemented several programmes to encourage people to work (e.g., Kickstart and work coaches) several areas within the design of the UC system hinder some people to work. Based on a recent study conducted by Citizens Advice there are three areas that need to be reformed within the UC system to make it more equitable and to improve access to the labour market. These are “paying childcare costs upfront; widening access to the work allowance for disabled people; and ensuring a more flexible approach to conditionality (Citizens Advice, 2021, p.2). Although these recommendations are tilted towards a UK-wide social security system, these are key recommendation to consider when designing and implementing a Welsh benefits system.

Moreover, third-sector workers and volunteers have not been allowed to have face-to-face meetings with vulnerable people, which include low-income individuals, to provide help and support to claiming benefits, pay bills, mental health, and poverty (JRF, 2021). Some people who have always worked have lost their jobs do not understand how to navigate through the benefits system while still trying to keep a roof over their heads and support their family (*ibid.*). According to the JRF (March 2021) “people on zero-hours or temporary contracts were four times more likely to lose their job, and self-employed people were three times more likely to stop working compared to people on permanent contracts. The lowest-paid workers and part-time workers were twice as likely to lose their jobs compared to the highest paid [...] Workers in poor-quality jobs in terms of security, hours and pay were disproportionately at risk of losing their job or having reduced hours, even compared to workers in the same sector and with the same personal and other job characteristics.” These stark findings demonstrate the substantial risk of having a high number of insecure jobs during an economic downturn. This also highlights the crucial need for prioritising job security and quality as part of delivering a

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

stronger economy, fair society, and improved pay for low-income workers. The JRF are calling on Government to bring forward the Employment Bill and use it to “introduce new rights to more secure work so people can plan their family life and finances” (JRF, 2021, p.1). Providing a choice for workers to opt in to having a secure contract with their employer (or continue on zero-hours or short-hours contracts) after twenty-six weeks of working is one of their key recommendations, in addition to compensating workers for last-minute cancellation of work shifts.

In addition, many self-employed individuals and partnerships claimed the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) grants during the pandemic. However, according to the Low-Income Tax Reform Group (LITRG), many of those who claimed SEISS grants are unaware that it is subject to both income tax and national insurance and need to be declared on self-assessment tax returns (Low Income Tax Reform Group Press Release, June 2021). Thus, claimants risk submitting incorrect tax returns, underpaying the tax they owe, and risk being sanctioned. The LITRG has had to deal with several confused taxpayers seeking guidance and help to complete their tax returns regarding this issue. So much so, it prompted LITRG to have to publish specific guidance to taxpayers because they have not been able to understand HMRC guidance on this matter.

Recently, certain parts of self-assessment tax returns are pre-populated with income information, such as employment income already reported by employers. However, as SEISS was introduced very quickly, HMRC cannot pre-populate tax returns with the amount of SEISS grants received. This compounds the issue for taxpayers who are already “experiencing ongoing disruption and stress because of the pandemic” (*ibid.*). This issue also effects tax credits claimants who have claimed coronavirus-related payments as some may be treated as income for tax credits purposes. According to Victoria Todd, Head of LITRG, “there will be potential confusion about the various Covid-19 payments, whether they count as income for tax credits and how they should be declared” (LITRG Press Release, 14.06.2021). She adds, “HMRC have published some information on the GOV.UK website outlining some of the payments to include as income for tax credits. However, the GOV.UK does not explain how these payments should be declared” and claimants need to check that they are not “double counting” the income on their claim forms because some financial support is paid through their wage packet and will already be included in their employment income figure.

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

Delivering effective support in Wales and in a more targeted way, we call for a more devolved approach, especially in provisions of the welfare state such as the benefits system. Having full control of this section of welfare would enhance Wales' ability to adapt and act flexibly to the needs of Wales' population.

- **How effectively do the Welsh Government's allowances and grants meet the particular needs of people in Wales?**

We have nothing specific to contribute to this area since it does not overlap with our main areas of expertise and interest.

- **What reforms are needed to the benefits system and should there be further devolution of powers?**

We believe that there is a strong and urgent case for the devolution of responsibilities for social security to a social democratic Welsh Government. Since the Welsh Assembly (now Parliament) was established in 1999 there has been a process of devolving more powers and responsibilities to Welsh Government and most recently a system of reserved powers was set up which allows the Welsh Parliament to take responsibility for any area that has not been reserved for Westminster. In recent times the Welsh Government has attained taxation powers, including the power to vary income tax, and legislative powers. This has been widely viewed as the Welsh polity coming of age. Yet it lacks real power in a fundamental area of social policy, namely social security, and must observe the effects of austerity policies on Wales with little ability to respond and having relied on words not action.

Social Security is a UK-wide, non-devolved, system. However, Wales currently has some devolved welfare powers, such as Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Discretionary Assistance Fund. Equally, employment law is not devolved to Wales which restricts the amount and degree of changes that can take place in Wales to help reduce poverty. The Welsh Select Committee should consider full devolution of the social welfare benefit system so that financial and in-kind support can be more closely tailored towards the needs of the people in Wales. As mentioned above, Wales faces the highest poverty rate as compared to the rest of the UK, in particular amongst children, women, and single parents. There is consensus amongst evidence collected from several reputable organisations (some of which mentioned in this response) that Wales has its own unique social security issues and therefore needs. It is therefore clear that Wales needs its own welfare benefits system so that it provides financial and in-kind support

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

to low-income households in the most effective, targeted and meaningful ways. In addition, welfare systems need to work more effectively with other Government and third-party systems (such as, DWP, HMRC, employer and banking systems) so that relevant information is shared and help populate benefit claim forms. This would save time, cost, and reduce errors and fraud, ultimately benefiting both recipients and Governments. Implementing one system that works in collaboration with other systems so that claimants have one point of contact when claiming and making enquiries, which treats people on a fair, consistent, and timely manner, would also benefit both recipients and Governments.

In addition, recipients need guidance from the UK/Welsh Governments on the type of benefits available to them, how and when to claim. Clear and comprehensive guidance is crucial in helping recipients claim the right benefits to which they are entitled. Effective guidance help minimise error and fraud, reduce potential overpayments, and builds trust in the benefits system (Closs-Davies et al., 2021). Poor quality of services, such as complicated jargon, vague and unclear letters, aggressive notices, long telephone delays or responses to appeals and letters foster less trust in the system and make it less accessible for those who need it most (Closs-Davies, 2021). Finally, Wales should introduce better work security measures that will strengthen employment practices, social and economic outcomes for individuals and families.

- **How effectively do the UK and Welsh Governments work together in the delivery of benefits in Wales?**

It has been recorded elsewhere (Mullen, 2019) that the formal framework for cooperation and communication between the devolved governments and the Westminster Government is not working effectively. The institutions formed to bring ministers together has demonstrated poor effectiveness. The Joint Ministerial Committee involving all the devolved nations has been ineffective and dominated by Westminster. This raises concerns about the future of social security in Wales since strong institutional links at ministerial and civil service levels will be imperative. Although the UK Government topped up UC by an extra £20 per week in October 2020 for low-income families, this is not enough to help Welsh families who face high housing costs, are on low pay and work insecure and flexible working hours. The pandemic has increased the number of people who are working flexible hours, such as care workers, delivery drivers and supermarket workers. The UK Government plan to cut the temporary uplift in UC in the Autumn which will likely worsen Welsh poverty rates. According to Frances O'Grady,

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

increasing financial support to low-income families will not only provide them with a “decent standard of living” but also aid spending that “will help our businesses and high streets recover. It’s the fuel in the tank that our economy needs.” Cuts in household spending would restrain economic activity and have knock-on effects on business and wage growth in Wales. This reality obstructs our country’s path to a more prosperous future.

- **What are the implications of the Universal Basic Income pilot in Wales?**

The Universal Basis Income (UBI) is gaining momentum with numerous international evaluated trials and pilots indicating some promising results. The announcement of a pilot to test the viability of a UBI in Wales is fantastic news. However, the inevitable success of this will, as above, depend on Wales being able to legislate on its own social security and will call for further devolution of powers.

For clarity our definition of a UBI is; ‘**Universal**’ in that everyone receives a payment, individually regardless of contributions or earned income and is non-means-tested. This regular payment is non-withdrawable and non-behaviour dependent. ‘**Basic**’ as it intends to provide for basic human needs within a capitalist system (attending to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs) and allowing people the dignity to be able to exercise choice in their purchases. ‘**Income**’ as a financial payment, regularly, independently paid to every citizen.

Both academic discussions of UBI and of successful trials of UBI have concluded that UBI works. Introducing a full UBI in Wales would benefit low-income families are economic recovery following the pandemic. Many short- and long-term trials of UBI have been undertaken across both the developed and developing world; spreading from capitalist neoliberal nations such as the USA, through to Social Democratic nations such as Finland, through to the developing countries of India and Kenya. However, one of the most successful trials of UBI was undertaken in Stockton Calif. USA (SEED, 2021) where interim findings has thus far highlighted that even a moderate increase in guaranteed income can have profound effects.

125 residents of Stockton were given a UBI totalling \$500 per month for 24 months (in line with UBI as explained above). Preliminary independent academic analysis of the SEED findings (West et al, 2021) evidence that; recipients reported a reduction in income fluctuations and volatility during the trial. They found that recipients had more money to spend on healthier food, paying-off problem debt and, surprisingly, most recipients increased the number of hours

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

worked or moved into full-time employment. Longer-term economic gains were also recognised in that recipients reported a reduction in mental ill health issues such as depression and anxiety, fostering an overall increased sense of wellbeing.

The announcement of a pilot of UBI in Wales is fantastic. However, we argue that the delivery is troubling. One foundational principle of a UBI is that it is *unconditional* and the First Minister's proposal to focus/target care leavers, although admirable, means that this proposed pilot will be limited and thus not reflective of true evidence or impact. The Welsh trial needs to be, if it is to be meaningful and persuasive, implemented across all geographical areas of Wales and include a wider cohort of participants. It needs to be properly evaluated and it needs to be seen to conclusion and not abandoned mid-way as has occurred in a few international trials. This was the case in Finland where the right-wing government abandoned the trial too early because it was not seeing sufficient savings. Thus, it was taking a narrow view rather than the broader view necessary for a sound and rigorous trial.

For the future success of the UBI in Wales the following need to be achieved:

1. Extended to include a wider cohort of recipients
2. Reduction in state bureaucratic costs.
3. The use of the payment in positive ways by participants, such as in opening a business or entering (further) education for new skills and knowledge.

To demonstrate these criteria the methodology of the Welsh trial needs to be improved considerably to cover all geographical areas and wider participants in Wales. Otherwise, the trial risks becoming tokenistic and meaningless. As one of the main issues in conducting a UBI pilot in Wales, this is a significant issue and obstructs Wales' ability to develop a more prosperous life for people and for its economy. Retaining the pilot in its current 'care-leavers' form risks devaluing the potential true findings of a genuine UBI pilot. The result of which will be further delay to implementation. Previous and current trials of UBI show that it works thus urgent action is needed to move towards full implementation. Doing so would mean that Wales becomes the first country in the world to have eliminated poverty.

We believe, in line with the Welsh Governments commitment to supporting the wellbeing of future generations, that a UBI is the most promising long-term commitment to supporting current and future generations and should be implemented.

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

References:

Beck, D. and Gwilym, H., 2020. “The moral maze of food bank use”, *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, vol 28, no 3, 383–399, DOI: 10.1332/175982720X15905998909942

Beck, D., 2021. “*Tackling Poverty and Inequality*”, In Gwilym, H and Williams C. Eds. (2021) *Social Policy for Welfare Practice in Wales*. Birmingham: BASW / Venture Press.

Bevan Foundation, 2020a, “A Welsh Benefits System, how it can help solve poverty”, Research Report, 17 September 2020, available at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/resources/a-welsh-benefits-system/>

Bevan Foundation, 2020b, “A Snapshot of Poverty in Winter”, published in December 2020, available at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/A-snapshot-of-poverty-in-winter-2020.pdf>

Chwarae Teg, 2019, “Trapped: Poverty Amongst Women in Wales Today”, published in December 2019, available at: <https://chwaraeteg.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Trapped-Poverty-amongst-women-in-Wales-today.pdf>

Citizens Advice, 2020, “Coronavirus Debts: Estimating the Size of Lockdown Arrears in Wales”, published in November 2020, available at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Wales/Coronavirus%20Debt%20Wales.pdf>

Citizens Advice, 2021, “Roadblock to recovery: Why the rules in Universal Credit are creating barriers to work”, Research Report issues 10 June 2021, available at: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/our-work/policy/policy-research-topics/welfare-policy-research-surveys-and-consultation-responses/welfare-policy-research/roadblock-to-recovery-why-the-rules-in-universal-credit-are-creating-barriers-to-work/>

Closs, Davies, S. C., 2021, “Transforming citizens into self-responsible individuals through relational practices at the frontline of tax administration: a study of the UK Tax Credits system”, Contemporary Issues Vol 4, Chapter 6, in press

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

Closs-Davies, S.C., Merkl-Davies, D.M. and Bartels, K.P., (2021), ‘Tax Credits as an accounting technology of government: “showing my boys they have to work, because that is what happens”, Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, in press

CSJ, 2021, “Early Years Commission: A Cross-Party Manifesto”, The Centre for Social Justice, July 2021, available at: <https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/CSJJ8647-Early-Years-Commission-report-210706.pdf>

Department for Work and Pensions, 2021, “Universal Credit statistics, 29 April 2013 to 14 January 2021”, published 23 February 2021, available at:

Gwilym, H ‘Wales 20 Years On: The Record and New Goals’. In Gwilym, H and Williams C. Eds. (2021) *Social Policy for Welfare Practice in Wales*. Birmingham: BASW / Venture Press.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-14-january-2021/universal-credit-statistics-29-april-2013-to-14-january-2021>

Institute for Fiscal Studies, July 2021, “The expiry of the Universal Credit uplift: impacts and policy options”, Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15528>

JRF, January 2021, “COVID-19 is adding more stress and insecurity for people in poverty”, 13 January 2021, available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/blog/covid-19-adding-more-stress-and-insecurity-people-poverty>

JRF, July 2021, “Making jobs work: Improvements to job quality are key to our recovery”, Report, 20 July 2021, available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/making-jobs-work-improvements-job-quality-are-key-our-recovery>

JRF, March 2021, “What the first COVID-19 lockdown meant for people in insecure, poor-quality work”, published 31 March 2021, available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/what-first-covid-19-lockdown-meant-people-insecure-poor-quality-work>

JRF, November 2020, “Poverty in Wales 2020”, Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/poverty-wales-2020>

Low Income Tax Reform Group, June 2021, “Concern at tax return confusion for recipients of COVID-19 self-employment grants”, Press release 24 June 2021, available at:

Sara Closs-Davis (Bangor University)
Hefin Gwilym (Bangor University)
Dave Beck (University of Salford)

<https://www.litrg.org.uk/latest-news/news/210624-press-release-concern-tax-return-confusion-recipients-covid-19-self>

Mullen, T (2019) ‘Brexit and the Territorial Governance of the United Kingdom’. Contemporary Social Science 14(2): 276-93.

Office for National Statistics, 2020, “Employee Earnings in the UK: 2020”, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/bulletins/annualsurveyofhoursandearnings/2020>

SEED, 2021, “Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration”, Available at: <https://www.stocktondemonstration.org/>

The Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2020, “Living standards, poverty and inequality in the UK: 2020”, Research Report, Published June 2020, available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/uploads/R170-Living-standards-poverty-and-inequality-in-the-UK-2019-2020%20.pdf>

TUC, 2021, ‘60,000 children in keyworker households in Wales living in poverty – Wales TUC’, published 14.07.21, available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/60000-children-keyworker-households-wales-living-poverty-wales-tuc>

Welsh Assembly, 2021, “Poverty and supporting low-income households”, Article from ‘What’s Next? Key Issues for the Sixth Senedd’ Collection, published 25 May 20201, available at: <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/poverty-and-supporting-low-income-households/>

Welsh Government, 2021, “Summary Data About Coronavirus (COVID-19) and the Response to It: 24 March 2021”, published 24 March 2021, available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2021/4/2/1618917566/summary-data-about-coronavirus-covid-19-and-response-it-24-march-2021.pdf>

West, S, Castro Baker, A, Samra, S and Coltrera, E., 2021. “Preliminary Analysis: SEED’s First Year”. Available: <https://www.stocktondemonstration.org/#summary-of-key-findings>