



# Universal Credit to Basic Income: A Politically Feasible Transition?

J o s h   M a r t i n

*Universal Credit, the UK working-age benefit, attempts to address issues of complexity, inflexibility, and work disincentivisation within the benefits system. However, its delayed rollout and emphasis on conditionality raise questions over its applicability to 21st century labour market problems. Instead, universal basic income tackles similar goals and arguably better addresses labour market changes. But is this transition politically feasible? Through interviews with policy actors from four UK political parties, arguments for and against the likelihood of this transition are presented by utilising theories of welfare state development.*

## Introduction

How feasible is it that a universal basic income, as a form of social security provision, could succeed the UK's Universal Credit scheme currently being introduced? This first requires contextual understanding of 21st century labour market restructuring currently challenging social security systems. Youth unemployment across Europe causes widespread concern (Fritzell et al., 2012), forcing a reconsideration of the desirability of social insurance systems, as youth have no contribution record. Automation has eliminated many middle-class, routine jobs through technological innovation that will continue as corporations keep cutting costs due to globalised pressures (McIntosh, 2013; Siu & Jaimovich, 2015); 47% of U.S. jobs face a high risk of automation in two decades (Frey & Osborne, 2013). Further, recent wage stagnation has prevented men in particular from benefitting from increased growth (Plunkett, 2011). While men's wages stagnated, women's wages rose more parallel with growth during the transition from the male breadwinner model, wherein there existed gendered divisions of labour (men took paid work while women performed unpaid caring work), to an adult worker model (each adult seeks paid work but women still perform more unpaid work) (Lewis, 1992). This particularly challenged social insurance systems like Germany's Bismarckian system that protected labour market insiders, namely male breadwinners earning 'family wages', while women stayed home (Eichhorst & Marx, 2011; Fleckenstein, 2012). These labour market changes mark the shift from 20th century Fordism characterised by stable, lifelong jobs to post-Fordism characterised by precarious labour

markets with frequent employment status changes, forging the emergence of the ‘precarariat’ who are continually stuck in the cycle of obtaining and losing characteristically low-paid and low-skilled employment (Standing, 2011). These challenges demonstrate the necessity of 21st century solutions to 21st century labour market problems.

The 2010 UK social security policy reform produced a proposed Universal Credit, a benefit that supposedly sought to tackle the complexity, inflexibility, and perverse work incentives of the previous system by combining six benefits into one, tapering the benefit withdrawal at a lower rate, and increasing the conditionality claimants face (DWP, 2010a). But will Universal Credit sufficiently address issues surrounding the restructured labour market? This dissertation proposes a policy that achieves similar goals to Universal Credit but theoretically better addresses 21st century labour market issues: universal basic income. This will be apparent after analysing the advantages and disadvantages of basic income followed by similar analysis of Universal Credit. Regardless of the theoretical argument, however, this discussion begs the question of whether this policy transformation from Universal Credit to basic income is politically feasible. Thus, this dissertation seeks to determine the potential for political support for universal basic income in the UK political sphere through interviews with policy actors from four political parties: the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party of England and Wales, Labour, and the Conservatives. These interviews help uncover current sentiments about Universal Credit and how, if ever, basic income could become reality in the UK.

## **Universal Basic Income**

### *Introduction*

Universal basic income—or simply basic income or Citizen’s Income—refers to an unconditional, nonwithdrawable income paid to every individual as a right of citizenship (CIT, 2013). Men, women, children, and pensioners, regardless of wealth or employment status, receive a basic income with no means test or work requirement. The only income difference arises from an individual’s age: a child’s basic income would be lower than an adult’s, with a pensioner’s basic income even higher.

### *Key Arguments for Basic Income*

A basic income definitively satisfies Marshall’s (2006) conception of social citizenship and the ILO’s (2010) goal to set social protection floors in all countries by establishing an income floor that grants a level of economic security for everyone. If set high enough, basic income could theoretically eliminate extreme poverty, as defined by Townsend (1979), by giving everyone enough consistent cash to exceed the extreme poverty threshold. Further, basic income addresses benefit complexity by being remarkably simple to administer and understand, also avoiding moral questions related to stigma usually attached to targeted benefits and sanctions (Sheahan, 2012). Individuals receive an unconditional cash transfer to their bank accounts every week without having to opt in, cutting bureaucracy drastically by eliminating costly paperwork paternalism that characterises workfare systems around the world and instead trusting individuals to know what is best for themselves without state interference (Murray, 2008). Workfare policies see people fall through society’s cracks due to information gaps caused by complexity and compounded by disadvantage, supporting Murray’s (1984) Law of Imperfect Selection and creating Type II errors of eligible people not receiving benefits. Basic income prevents this through simplicity and continuity (Torry, 2013). While giving wealthy people basic income creates Type I errors, it strengthens middle class buy-in to universal benefits and services, fostering solidarity and preventing stigma (Korpi & Palme, 1998). Additionally,

basic income redefines power relations in precarious labour markets by empowering employees in bargaining negotiations with employers through a lower reliance on income from paid work (Wright, 2006). Basic income requires no contribution history, helping solve issues like youth unemployment that stem from social insurance systems.

Political philosophy produces further arguments for basic income. Van Parijs (1995, 2013) embraces utopian thinking, arguing that basic income can justify capitalism by creating real freedom for all citizens. Howard (2002) justifies basic income from utilitarian, Marxian, and Foucauldian ideologies. Standing et al. (2014) stress basic income's emancipatory value, as receiving basic income every week gives people hope and control. Duflo et al. (2015) reinforce this, finding that antipoverty programmes should emphasise giving people hope, as it significantly helps people out of poverty.

Even with these arguments, basic income faces three critical, valid questions: where has it been tried, will people work, and is it affordable?

#### *Where has basic income been tried?*

No country has fully implemented a basic income programme, but there have been significant pilot projects in Namibia and India and partial basic income programmes in Alaska and Iran. From 2007 to 2009, all residents of Otjivero-Omitara, Namibia, under age 60 received a basic income grant of N\$100 (\$12 USD) per person monthly, funded by voluntary contributions from basic income supporters throughout the world (BIG Coalition, 2009). The population under the poverty line fell 60% and there were reductions in crime, child malnutrition, and debt, as well as increases in employment, school attendance, clinic visits, savings, house improvements, household income (excluding basic income), and a 300% surge in income generated by self-employment (BIG Coalition, 2009). Understandably, the citizens most against the pilot were moneylenders whose businesses stuttered as people became more financially secure (BIG Coalition, 2009). Moreover, these statistics are skewed by extended family migration to Otjivero-Omitara; they did not receive the basic income but benefited from the influx of cash to relatives, suggesting the findings could be more impressive with a national basic income as domestic migration for economic reasons would lessen (BIG Coalition, 2009). The Indian pilot project ran from 2010 to 2011 in conjunction with the Self-Employed Women's Association, a prominent Voice organisation, splitting into three main programmes: one in Delhi and two in Madhya Pradesh, with one designed as a randomised control trial of eight villages receiving a basic income with 12 control villages, and the other being a tribal village that received a basic income compared to a control tribal village (Standing, 2013). While the basic income only reached 30% of the bare subsistence line (around \$5 USD monthly), the Indian pilots revealed parallel impacts on poverty, education, health, and work when compared to Namibia's pilot (Standing et al., 2014). These pilots allowed individuals to plan and prioritise their spending, whether it meant improving household sanitation, buying a sewing machine, fixing a well, or grouping together to restock a pond with fish in order to reignite the local fishing market (BIG Coalition, 2009; Standing et al., 2014). These pilots drummed up political momentum in both countries, as Zephania Kameeta, a BIG Coalition leader

in Namibia, was appointed Head of the Ministry for Poverty Alleviation, and India's government has debated basic income numerous times (Jourdan, 2015; Standing et al., 2014). However, these pilot projects occurred in destitute areas, raising questions about basic income's applicability to more developed economies (Hirsch, 2015).

The U.S. and Canada held numerous guaranteed minimum income experiments in the 1960s and 1970s, often operating as negative income tax (NIT) trials, which only give cash to those under a guaranteed

income level (Widerquist & Sheahen, 2012). Basic income and NIT are separate policies, differing on economic and ethical points of view but achieving the same distributive outcome (Davide, 2008), which explains why they are often grouped together—the U.S. Basic Income Guarantee Network (2015) includes both policies as acceptable basic income guarantees. However, Torry (2013) discourages accepting NIT over universal basic income since NIT lacks universality and thus forgoes some social benefits. Regardless, the U.S. almost adopted a NIT through President Nixon’s 1972 Family Assistance Plan (Neuberg, 2004). 1,200 economists from 150 universities signed a petition in favour of NIT by 1968, but Nixon’s proposal died in the Senate after passing the House (Neuberg, 2004). Guaranteed minimum income policies can gain mainstream traction, but there exist data deficiencies specifically on basic income pilots in developed countries. However, Switzerland votes on a basic income referendum in 2016 that would give each citizen \$2,800 USD monthly (Baghdjian, 2013). Further, the recently elected pro-basic income Finnish centre party promise to conduct a basic income experiment, as has the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands (Doré, 2015); pro-basic income parties in Canada, Spain, and New Zealand are polling in the top three parties with elections coming up in the next two years (Upton, 2015a, 2015b).

Partial basic income schemes already exist in Alaska and Iran. The Alaska Permanent Fund began in 1976 as a way for Alaska to siphon some of its oil revenue for public use, starting at \$734,000 and reaching over \$40 billion today (APFC, 2013). In 1980 the Permanent Fund started issuing annual dividends to each Alaskan resident, starting at \$1,000 and ranging between \$300 and \$2,000 since (APFC, 2013). Widerquist and Sheahen (2012) highlight the Permanent Fund Dividend’s political popularity in

Alaska, as neither political party wants to alter the dividends. Iran implemented a partial basic income of \$45 USD monthly per person, but introduced it as a replacement for previous energy and bread subsidies; however, this programme’s effects were stunted partially by Western sanctions on Iranian oil (Salehi-Isfahani, 2014). While neither example is of a full basic income, unconditional cash transfers clearly are policy possibilities in differing economies.

Additional evidence for cash transfer popularity comes from the Global South, where at least 45 countries have conditional or unconditional cash transfer programmes, providing financial support to over 110 million families and acting as antipoverty and development strategies (Hulme et al., 2014). Two major conditional cash transfer programmes, Mexico’s Oportunidades and Brazil’s Bolsa Familia, establish simple conditions like school attendance or clinic visits for benefit receipt. Provided clinics and schools are accessible and children need not work out of necessity, parents wish to fulfil these goals regardless of conditions being attached, suggesting unconditional cash transfers like basic income could achieve similar, or even better, outcomes in education and health while eliminating benefit conditionality (Griggs & Evans, 2010). Moreover, people do not spend cash transfers disproportionately on destructive goods like alcohol and tobacco (Evans & Popova, 2014).

### *Will people work?*

While basic income may seem to disincentivise work by giving everyone cash whether or not they work, Torry (2013) argues basic income actually maximises work incentives. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the previous UK benefits system created poverty traps where increasing paid work between zero and 10 hours did not necessarily improve net financial situations as benefits withdrew as quickly as income rose. Basic income is never withdrawn, so every hour of paid labour brings maximum financial reward, as shown by Figure 2’s steady slope of net wages (Torry, 2013). Moreover, unemployed people are sufficiently motivated to find work even if they receive benefits

indefinitely, as they would with basic income (Shimer & Werning, 2008).

Figure 1. Work Disincentives with the 2010 UK Benefits System (Torry, 2013)

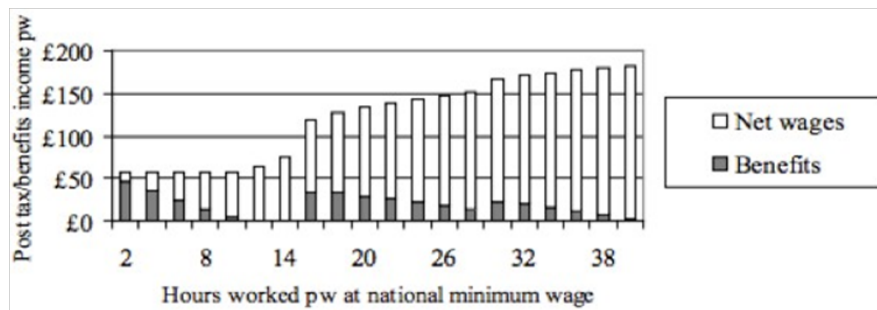
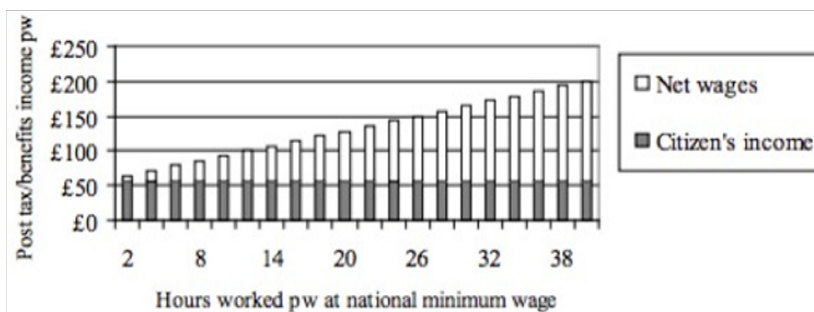


Figure 2. Work Disincentives with Basic Income (Torry, 2013)



However, Bergmann (2005) questions work incentives under a high basic income, arguing a basic income comfortable enough to live off could disincentivise work. Forget (2011) evaluated a Canadian NIT experiment in the 1970s that set the guaranteed minimum income at 60% of Statistics Canada's low-income cut-off mark, finding slight reductions in work effort from two groups: mothers who took longer to resume work after childbirth, and teenagers who stayed in school longer instead of working to support their households. These two groups should not necessarily be pushed into work as quickly as they were before the experiment. Nonetheless, no basic income experiment set the income level above the poverty line, so Bergmann's critique remains partially unanswered.

*Is basic income affordable?*

Arguably the most important question basic income faces is its affordability. While Hirsch (2015) argues a UK basic income set at current safety net levels and funded

through income tax would require direct taxes of 40% on all earned income, he ignores other avenues to raise public funds. Piketty (2014) suggests progressive taxation on capital, and basic income could help tackle climate change through a carbon fee-and- dividend programme that imposes carbon fees on corporations and/or individuals, distributing the funds uniformly via cash dividends, mirroring a basic income (CCL, 2014; Howard, 2013; Lewis & Widerquist, 2009). Hirsch (2015) argued the Citizen's Income Trust's (CIT) (2013) UK proposal would hurt financial situations of many people currently receiving benefits, which led Torry (2014) to propose a solution where a basic income became the safety net floor but the system temporarily kept means- tested benefits that basic income would replace in limited fashion to ensure few poor households would lose income from the transition. However, Hirsch (2015) questions whether adding basic income to the benefits

system would achieve the simplicity advocates claim if some means-tested benefits remain in place. In particular, he argues that replacing Housing Benefit with basic income would require the basic income level to double. He believes a basic income that fails to replace all means-testing fails to achieve its own simplicity goals, but he fails to acknowledge how much simpler the system would be to understand if basic income replaced most, but not all, means-tested benefits. While basic income may not fully simplify the system, significant simplification is still worthwhile. Especially on areas like housing and regional cost of living differences, keeping a means-tested benefit aimed at making living costs affordable across the country should not be an argument against moving towards basic income.

The Green Party (2015a) produced a detailed basic income scheme for the 2015 election that clearly learned from Hirsch's debate with the CIT. As seen in Figure 3, the Green Party's scheme increases Child Benefit to £50 weekly, implements a basic income of £80 weekly, and creates a Citizen's Pension of £155 weekly, with basic income supplements for lone parents, lone pensioners, and disabled people. Including supplements within the basic income scheme raises questions about basic income's egalitarian roots, however, as different individuals of the same age who are more disadvantaged will deservedly receive more income than others, but it will be under the guise of a supposedly equal basic income. It may be better to rebrand basic income

supplements as different programmes in order to maintain the semblance of equal basic incomes.

Figure 3. Green Party Basic Income Levels (Green Party, 2015a)

Cost of Citizen's Income in 2015-16				
	Weekly rate (£)	Annual rate (£)	Number (million)	Cost (£ billion)
Children	50	2,600	13.7	35.6
Working age	80	4,160	38.7	161.1
Pensioners	155	8,060	13.6	110.0
Lone parents	80	4,160	2.0	8.5
Lone pensioners	25	1,300	4.3	5.6
<b>Total</b>				<b>320.8</b>

All legal residents who have lived in the UK for at least a year receive this basic income, addressing questions on immigration and citizenship. After accounting for emergency payments to ensure nobody loses income during the transition, the Green Party (2015a) assumes a total gross cost of £331 billion. This basic income replaces many existing benefits, totalling £164 billion, but notably leaves Housing Benefit and Disability Living Allowance alone. To offset the remaining cost, the Green Party (2015a) abolishes the personal income tax allowance, yielding £90 billion, eliminates primary and secondary thresholds for National Insurance contributions (NICs), saving £48 billion, and removes 44% of the total of tax and National Insurance relief on pension contributions, returning £18 billion. They also assume administrative savings of £8 billion from cuts in bureaucracy and £3 billion in savings on the abolition of Child and Working Tax Credits. Individuals earning under £41,000 yearly, around four-fifths of taxpayers, financially gain under the basic income transition, while those earning over £41,000 lose from the switch (Green Party, 2015a). With the abolition of tax allowances, however, every pound earned is subject to a 32% effective tax rate at first, since income tax is 20% and NICs are 12% (Green Party, 2015a). Hirsch (2015) questions the desirability of eliminating tax allowances, since taxing every earned pound could be arduous, but this proposal avoided raising income taxes, which Hirsch particularly worried about.

Clearly, basic income is affordable by raising and redistributing public revenue through numerous mechanisms. The problem concerns the political acceptability of raising revenue and passing such massive social security reform.

### *Ideologically Diverse Arguments for Basic Income*

An early influential thinker to support basic income, Thomas Paine (1795) argued for a ‘basic endowment’ that gave individuals a share of the wealth generated by resources humans once commonly owned but have since been owned and worked by others. For libertarians and conservatives, people like Murray (2008) advocate basic income because it drastically cuts bureaucracy and trusts individuals over the state to know what is best for themselves; for progressives and social democrats, people like Martin Luther King Jr. (1967) support basic income because it can radically reduce poverty if set high enough while also eliminating poverty traps and stigmatising workfare programmes. Basic income’s ideological versatility helps explain how Nixon’s proposal in 1972 united the centre-left and centre-right only to have the extremes of both parties defeat it, as the far-right thought welfare spending should be non-existent and the far-left wanted a larger guaranteed income (Neuberg, 2004).

### *Major Critiques of Basic Income*

Feminists disagree over how basic income affects gender relations. Robeyns (2007) compares basic income to paid parental and care leave, worrying it strengthens traditional gendered divisions of labour by not sufficiently rewarding care work. Elgarte (2010) disagrees, asserting basic income provides income security for women, especially for homemakers and double shifters, while also promoting female independence from financially unequal relationships. O’Reilly (2008) views this debate neutrally, claiming basic income will not effect gender equally throughout the world and that basic income is too often viewed as a silver bullet that will solve every issue. The silver bullet critique is necessary to consider. Basic income cannot replace the entire social security system; rather, it should be the base upon which should be a social insurance system, programmes for disadvantaged groups, and collectively bargained occupational benefits (Standing, 2004). Further, while (un)conditional cash transfer programmes increase school attendance and clinic visits, increased access to schools or clinics alone is not enough to achieve health or educational attainment goals: countries must invest in better services alongside cash transfer programmes (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009). Issues in immigration, citizenship, and vertical inequality between countries generate movements for cross-national, regional basic income programmes, e.g. an EU-

wide basic income (Jordö, 2014), but countries contemplating implementing any robust social programmes face regional worries. Bergmann (2005) prefers universal, in-kind benefits in Swedish-style welfare states, but in-kind benefits paternalistically mistrust individuals to spend cash on ‘worthy’ goods and services and are often bureaucratic and expensive (Currie & Gahvari, 2007).

Universal basic income addresses youth unemployment, gives women increased financial autonomy, and protects individuals from wage stagnation and reliance on precarious jobs and those at risk of automation. While arguments for and against basic income have existed for centuries, no country has implemented it. Perhaps the restructured labour market of the 21st century will finally push it into the international policy spotlight. For the UK, basic income would replace Universal Credit.

## Universal Credit

### Context

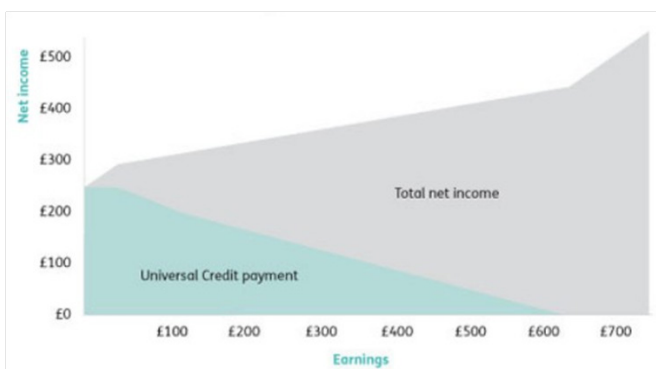
Before examining Universal Credit, it is important to understand the complex benefits system the UK Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government inherited in 2010. Two separate government departments (Jobcentre Plus and HM Revenue & Customs), and hundreds of local authorities in Great Britain and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, administered numerous benefits assessed on both the household and individual level ranging from Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, Child Benefit, Working Tax Credit, and others, costing £3.5 billion yearly in administration (DWP, 2010a). Further, the out-of-work benefits and in-work support systems were inflexible, meaning employment status changes required new paperwork each time individuals switched systems (DWP, 2010a). This system disincentivised work by lowering benefits as quickly as income rose from paid work, leading the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) (2010a) to attempt to address issues of complexity, inflexibility, and work disincentives by implementing a new working-age benefit. Among the policy options discussed, including an NIT, newly appointed Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith pushed Universal Credit forward, a policy originating from the Centre

for Social Justice which became one of five major policies on cash transfers and income distribution in the Coalition government (DWP, 2010b; Hills, 2015).

### Universal Credit's Design

Universal Credit's aim for simplicity is to combine six benefits into one, replacing Housing Benefit, Income Support, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance (DWP, 2010a). Universal Credit provides allowances for children, disability, housing, and caring, but leaves Disability Living Allowance, Child Benefit, and contributory Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance untouched (DWP, 2010a). To combat inflexibility, Universal Credit merges out-of-work and in-work benefits and tax systems to better understand people's changing financial situations, delivering a household's monthly benefit electronically, automatically adjusting it as monthly income changes through a real-time Pay As You Earn tax system (DWP, 2010a). Universal Credit's withdrawal rate is 65%, clearly improving the withdrawal rates under the previous system that could reach 95% (Royston, 2012). Viewing Figures 1, 2, and 4, Universal Credit acts as a midway point between the previous system and basic income as it standardises benefit withdrawal.

Figure 4. Universal Credit for Lone Parents with Two Children (DWP, 2010a)



Alongside the increased financial incentive to find work, Universal Credit intensified



and extended conditionality through ‘Claimant Commitments’ with Work Coaches that consider job searching full-time work and deliver sanctions to claimants who fail to fulfil commitments (DWP, 2010a). The DWP (2010a) claimed Universal Credit would save £0.5 billion annually on administration costs and could move 850,000 people out of poverty.

### *Issues with Universal Credit*

Notwithstanding its theoretical underpinnings, Universal Credit’s implementation has been disastrous. New out-of-work claims were supposed to fall under Universal Credit in October 2013, but the DWP pushed that goal to 2017 (NAO, 2013). The first Universal Credit rollout in April 2013, mostly in Northwest England, covered 65,380 cases by May 2015; however, the estimated full caseload is 7.7 million recipients in 2017 (DWP, 2015a). The 2015 rollout should increase caseload numbers, but they cannot accept claimants with children (DWP, 2014). Issues surrounding project management and the IT system needed to calculate real-time benefit levels largely caused the delayed rollout, and the NAO (2013) claims the DWP has not achieved value for money in Universal Credit’s implementation. These rollout issues do not signal discomfort with the policy idea, however (Sainsbury, 2014). The DWP (2015b, 2015c) states initial claimant results reveal a simpler, easier to understand system that is more likely to find people work than previously.

Universal Credit as a policy creates plenty of problems, however. While Universal Credit publicises its withdrawal rate at 65%, it reaches 76% when considering NICs (Royston, 2012). This lowers marginal deduction rates (MDRs) for many benefit recipients but actually increases MDRs for many claimants previously not in receipt of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit; overall, 1.2 million individuals see lower MDRs while 2.1 million face higher MDRs (Royston, 2012). Similarly, 3.1 million households average gains of £168 monthly, but 2.8 million others average losses of £137 monthly (Dwyer & Wright, 2014).

Universal Credit cut childcare funding, sextupling costs (Royston, 2012), but the DWP’s (2014) Test and Learn approach allowed them to address this, tripling costs

instead. Universal Credit cut Child Tax Credit’s disability element and abolished the Severe Disability Premium and the Enhanced Disability Premium, costing disabled adults up to £69 weekly and harming households with disabled children (Royston, 2012). By using Income Support’s capital rules, Universal Credit punishes households with savings over £16,000, punishing saving for expensive assets (Royston, 2012). Universal Credit harms self-employed individuals by assuming an income floor that many new businesses cannot reach in their early years (Royston, 2012). Dean (2012) urges policymakers to fix the precarious labour market’s demand-side issues alongside Universal Credit in hopes employers help Universal Credit claimants find acceptable jobs.

Issues arise from administering Universal Credit monthly instead of weekly and by household instead of individually. Hartfree (2014) worries switching money management rhythms of claimants from weekly to monthly benefits disrupts financial habits, and Annesley and Bennett (2011) fear Universal Credit’s decision to assess benefits on a household level reasserts the male breadwinner model. Benefit individualisation promotes individual financial control (Walker, 2005), but Universal Credit threatens such autonomy by introducing major financial problems when household second earners separate and become lone parents, whom Universal Credit particularly targeted for conditionality (Brewer & De Agostini, 2014; Puttick, 2012).

Universal Credit's intensification of conditionality particularly causes problems. Supranational organisations like the OECD (1994) and the Bretton Woods institutions encourage neoliberal cuts and conditionality partially thanks to the 1980s emergence of the 'Washington Consensus' (Deacon, 2007), and Universal Credit continues the 'ubiquity of conditionality at the heart of 21st century UK social citizenship' (Dwyer & Wright, 2014). Workfare programmes with strong conditionality and sanctions dominate UK social security policy through beliefs that behavioural change is necessary to move people into work, ignoring structural issues that impact individuals' livelihoods (Dwyer & Wright, 2014). Under Universal Credit's conditionality structure, governed largely by the Work Programme (DWP, 2012), not applying for employment results in a 91-day sanction for the first offense, rising to three years for a third failure, regardless

of the local labour market (Dwyer & Wright, 2014). Universal Credit extends conditionality to new groups, including those already employed and claimants' partners, and intensifies conditionality especially for disabled people and lone parents, two vulnerable groups (Dwyer & Wright, 2014; Grabham & Smith, 2010). Worryingly, vulnerable claimants are more likely to be sanctioned because they struggle to navigate the system due to information gaps between the state and claimants (Oakley, 2014). Further, younger claimants face sanctions disproportionately often, heightening youth unemployment issues (Watts et al., 2014). Sanctions generate stress and mental health issues, and these vulnerable groups suffer in the current contractualist workfare system even before sanctions (Watts et al., 2014). In fairness, Universal Credit seeks to address information gaps through simplification, but intensifying conditionality on vulnerable groups hinders intended progress. Griggs and Evans (2010) compellingly argue that conditionality and sanctions fail to achieve desirable long-term outcomes; while conditionality moves people successfully off benefits short-term and into work, sanctions empirically produce unfavourable spill-over effects like higher crime rates and increased spending on other benefits that offset any savings. Sanctioning benefits causes liquidity strains that rush job searches and prompt less optimal labour market outcomes since people need time to find the right job that will propel them out of poverty and off all benefits (Chetty, 2008). Thus, Universal Credit claimants unsurprisingly find jobs faster than claimants under the previous system (DWP, 2015b).

Strong conditionality alone makes Universal Credit undesirable, but short-term thinking allows it to flourish under a UK Conservative government that pledged £12 billion in cuts to welfare after winning the 2015 election. £9 billion of these cuts will come from tax credits that top-up the working poor's wages, but these cuts accompany a minimum wage increase from £6.50 to £9 hourly by 2020 (Osborne, 2015). However, cuts to tax credits will not be sufficiently offset by the minimum wage increase, which will raise only £4 billion in pay (Johnson, 2015). Skidelsky (2015) notes that 38% of working families in 2012 needed tax credits to compensate for low wages and argues tax credit cuts may devastate poor citizens. Especially as automation leads to fewer available jobs, the new budget relies too heavily on income derived from the labour market through a

higher minimum wage, so Skidelsky (2015) recommends considering basic income as a new labour market solution.

### **Universal Credit to Basic Income: A Possible Transition?**

Universal Credit tried to address issues of complexity, inflexibility, and work disincentives from the previous system. However, many people are worse off under Universal Credit, household

administration reaffirms the male breadwinner model, and reasserting conditionality harms vulnerable claimants. Basic income is simpler, more flexible, and better incentivises work than Universal Credit, all while avoiding conditionality, household administration, and benefit withdrawal.

As the Conservative majority government decides its social security plan, Universal Credit's future remains uncertain. Considering the transition from Universal Credit to basic income, the Coalition government de-universalised Child Benefit, the UK policy most like basic income, suggesting universal cash transfers are viewed exceedingly costly during austerity. Hirsch (2015) argues the transition requires shifts in attitudes and policy, like an acceptance that everybody should be supported at some level with no work-based conditions and recognition of a greater state role in redistribution. Hirsch (2015) believes politicians perceive these ideas as unacceptable to voters, pointing to the British Social Attitudes Survey (Natcen, 2012), which found a long-term hardening of attitudes toward whether people deserve support if they do not work; however, he admits Universal Credit creates a similar underlying structure as basic income and that basic income can gain feasibility if public attitudes toward welfare recipients change.

The Universal Credit to basic income transition appears more palatable after considering evidence of basic income support across many UK political parties. Jordan et al. (2000) interviewed 12 MPs from multiple parties, finding support from broadly half, coming from Old Labour, Plaid Cymru, the Conservatives, and the Liberal Democrats; however, these MPs were policy outsiders who held little sway over their parties' social security policy decisions. Interestingly, policy insiders were most hostile

to basic income (Jordan et al., 2000). These interviews were 15 years ago, however. How politically feasible is a UK basic income now?

## **Methodology**

To assess the UK political support for basic income, I chose to conduct qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, utilising Bryman's (2012) work, on Universal Credit and basic income with policy actors from non-regional UK political parties, with particular interest toward each political party's current level of basic income support. To find policy actors to interview, I emailed each political party's policy divisions explaining my dissertation's purpose and asking to connect with someone knowledgeable about social security issues. No email address was found for the Liberal Democrats, so I sent the initial email directly to a policy actor. These emails resulted in interviews with policy actors from the Green Party, Labour, and the Liberal Democrats, while five recommended Conservative candidates rejected me. Instead, I interviewed a Conservative through the help of the Basic Income UK organisation. A fifth party, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), declined my invitation for an interview, writing, 'This is not something UKIP will consider or comment on.'

Before conducting any interviews, I completed a research ethics review and crafted an information sheet and consent form (Appendix A) for each respondent. Each interviewee selected their preferred level of confidentiality. For interviews with policy actors from Labour, the Greens, and the Liberal Democrats, I conducted in-person interviews ranging from 40 to 75 minutes, recording each interview to avoid note-taking distractions. I conducted the Conservative interview using a different

method. The respondent wrote a book in 2014 containing an account of his political career and a chapter on why the Conservatives should support basic income, so instead of conducting an in-person interview, I read the appropriate chapters and maintained lengthy email correspondence where he answered further questions on the Conservative Party, Universal Credit, and basic income. Interview questions varied slightly for each respondent (interview details are in Appendix B). After completing the interviews, I analysed the recorded interviews by listening to the audio and taking notes. For the

Conservative interview, I compiled notes based on the interviewee's book and personal email correspondence.

There are obviously many limitations to this mixed-method approach (Bryman, 2012). While Jordan et al. (2000) interviewed twelve MPs, I interviewed four non-MP policy actors. Further, I undoubtedly influenced respondents' answers, and one individual's opinions on Universal Credit and basic income do not truly reflect a party's level of support for each policy, showing that these interviews should not be generalised to the party level. While issues of bias exist in interviewee selection—the Liberal Democrat and Conservative interviewees explicitly support basic income while their parties do not—such interviews provide interesting views into influencing political parties from inside. The policy actors interviewed differed in their job titles and in their ability to influence party policy, but their opinions on Universal Credit and basic income reveal modest insight into the basic income landscape in UK politics.

### **The Liberal Democrats**

The Liberal Democrats supported basic income from 1990 to 1994, dropping it from their manifesto citing affordability concerns (Goodwin, 1994). In their manifesto, the Liberal Democrats (2015) explicitly commit to completing Universal Credit's introduction, which they helped create in the Coalition government. They promise people will always benefit from work, and they hope to introduce a 'yellow card' in sanctioning, arguing that formal warnings may help bridge information gaps disadvantaged claimants face and that the sanctioning process must be reviewed. The Liberal Democrats could theoretically support a basic income transition, as it ensures people always profit from work, and it eliminates sanctions they view warily.

The Liberal Democrat respondent, Nick Barlow, served as a Councillor in Colchester from 2007 to 2015, and has since become primarily an activist after standing down in the 2015 election. While he holds no formal role within the party, he started a Liberal Democrats for Basic Income group and was interviewed by Basic Income News (Upton, 2015c). He considers himself better informed on Universal Credit and basic income than most people but does not believe he holds expertise on social security; his

knowledge stems from benefits system experience both first-hand and as a Councillor. Contemplating social security's future in the UK, he is pessimistic after the 2015 Conservative victory, airing concern over their focus on the 'dignity' of work and their preference for conditionality. Nonetheless, he admits Universal Credit holds promise as a policy, claiming Universal Credit would have persisted after the election regardless of the outcome, but actual policy details would have differed. Universal Credit's aim for simplicity resonates with him, as do its goals concerning flexibility and work incentives, but he imagines Universal Credit would rely less on conditionality under a

Liberal Democrat or Labour-led government.

Barlow first encountered basic income in the Liberal Democrats' 1992 election manifesto, but he initially labelled it impossible and unwise. Because of this, he stresses the importance of increasing awareness and framing discussions on basic income such that initial reactions do not condemn it to political impossibility. He eventually supported basic income after contemplating the future of work and automation, concluding some basic income will be necessary as work will be scarcer. Further, he contends basic income's ability to empower individuals attracts Liberal Democrats; however, he worries primarily whether people will work while receiving a significant basic income, channelling Bergmann's (2005) concerns. Society's views on work are hardened such that media stories about idle families receiving basic income could portray basic income negatively; thus, the key challenge for basic income advocates is to change public perceptions of benefits recipients.

Barlow holds little influence on the party's social security policy, but his strategy for mobilising Liberal Democrats to support basic income is to evaluate the party's new direction under Farron's leadership, to converse with the party's fringe members, and to opportunistically choose when to propose it to the whole party. While many basic income supporters from the early 1990s are still around, proposing basic income at the next convention could lead to defeat and unwillingness by the party to entertain the idea for another 10 to 15 years. He thinks basic income should become a long-term plan for the Liberal Democrats, as it could help propel them to political prominence.

Asked generally about how the UK could implement basic income, Barlow claimed Labour would support it if society's opinions on benefit recipients changed and if enough social pressure emerged for it. He cannot see the Conservatives supporting it even if their small libertarian wing advocated it. The basic income movement needs pressure inside and outside of politics, and he believes this can happen by changing the UK political system to proportional representation and by encouraging more basic income experiments in developed countries.

### **The Green Party**

The Green Party of England and Wales join Green parties across the world in supporting basic income (Upton, 2015b). In the Green Party's (2015b) manifesto, their commitment to basic income is the first proposal under the social security section and is labelled a two-term plan, as implementing it in five years would be difficult. Further, the Green Party (2015b) opposes sanctions and labels Universal Credit a 'disaster waiting to happen' as implementation is continually delayed. The Green Party clearly already support the transition from Universal Credit to basic income.

The Green Party respondent, Clive Martin, is an accredited policy expert on benefits issues within the Green Party and has spent his career working with the benefits system. He worked for the (now separated) Department for Health and Social Services, a welfare rights and advice campaigning group, within local government as a benefits advisor and then manager of advice services, and he now works as a benefits advisor for a company that creates means-testing calculating software. Although no Green Party member officially holds more influence than others in determining policy at conventions, he holds considerable informal influence within the party on benefits issues, as evidenced by his roles in drafting their manifesto's social security section and their basic income background papers.

Martin worries about the UK's social security direction, as reductions in universal and contributory benefits have been replaced by rampant means-testing. While Universal Credit betters the previous system, he voices plenty of concerns over Universal Credit, highlighting its assumptions about switching from weekly to monthly budgeting and

issues surrounding conditionality and the tech-induced rollout delay. He appreciates Universal Credit's attempt at simplification, but he holds an undoubtedly negative view of the programme. He believes Labour, the Liberal Democrats, and the Conservatives are all committed to keeping Universal Credit, which may lead to years of parallel systems that will enhance the system's complexity.

Martin passionately supports basic income and considers himself informed on debates surrounding it. When asked about his main hesitations about basic income, he cited the main questions he encounters from other Green Party members: the idleness question, affordability, and the lack of analogous empirical evidence. He believes the Liberal Democrats would be most open to supporting it, while the Conservatives would be extremely against the 'tax-and-spend, something-for-nothing' basic income idea. He worries Labour are currently 'confused' about benefits, as they support contributory benefits in an age of youth unemployment and zero-hours contracts. However, he thinks basic income could gain support through a change to proportional representation and a consistent Green surge over the next decade. Being in the Green Party shows his optimism about their future electoral chances, and he thinks a Green-led basic income could happen by 2020.

When asked if Universal Credit and basic income share similar goals, Martin hesitated, warning it is 'too good' to say that, since Universal Credit is still conditional and means tested. He thinks neoliberalism demands a bottom 20 to 30% of society to incentivise people to maintain employment in fear of claiming stigmatised Universal Credit and using food banks. In this system he finds Universal Credit oppressive and basic income liberating. However, he worries a move toward basic income must wait until the recent memory of Universal Credit's delayed rollout is relatively forgotten, since he thinks a transition to basic income could be more arduous.

## **The Labour Party**

While Labour has never explicitly supported basic income, some key members supported it, like libertarian socialist and Fabian G.D.H. Cole (1889-1959) (Jordan, 2012). In their manifesto, Labour (2015) openly support the model and principle of

Universal Credit, but they fail to discuss the desirability of sanctions. Instead, Labour (2015) promise paid jobs for those unemployed for one to two years. If the person turns down employment, all benefits are stopped (Labour, 2015). This manifesto promise conflicts with basic income, suggesting Labour are far from supporting a transition to basic income.

The Labour Party respondent holds expertise on social security policies and claims she knows Universal Credit 'too well'. While not a politician, she holds influence in the party through her recognition as a social security expert and by discussing these issues with prominent Labour politicians. Considering the social security system, she notes the Coalition government maintained a similar overall level of social security spending as the previous government, but they shifted spending significantly from working-age benefits to pensioners' benefits.

On Universal Credit's future, the Labour respondent clarifies Universal Credit has not truly happened yet due to technological issues, so its feasibility remains questionable. Had Labour won the election, she believes they would have held an emergency rescue committee to see if Universal Credit could actually work because the policy contains valuable ideas, including simplification and tax-benefit integration. However, she believes Universal Credit means different things to each party. Universal Credit's main design can be manipulated to fit different political ideologies by changing benefit levels, the taper rate, and other aspects of the policy. Because of this flexibility, she thinks Universal Credit support should not be considered in a yes or no binary and that it would have continued somehow regardless of the electoral outcome. On the desirability of Universal Credit's conditionality, she acknowledges that conditionality has existed since the early 1900s and that nobody knows how conditionality will work under Universal Credit because of its delayed rollout. Further, she clarifies the increase in sanctions during the Coalition government was not from Universal Credit, but was system-wide through the Work Programme. To her, conditionality is not central to Universal Credit debates.

The Labour respondent is familiar with basic income but is not 'massively keen' on the idea. She wrote a dissertation on whether conditionality should exist within the social security system and concluded there will always be some demand for reciprocity or recognition within the system, as there will always be social agreements over conditions required to live in society. Thus, there will be conditions under which someone can receive help in society. She, like Hirsch (2015), believes a truly simplified unconditional basic income is impossible, as there always exist some required conditions to receive a basic income, e.g. citizenship or residency requirements. These requirements impose conditions upon who receives basic income. On a simpler level, she holds philosophical hesitations to basic income's libertarian roots and its emphasis on individuals over society. An individual focus may create difficulties for society members who require extra help, e.g. disabled people, and thus basic income must accompany other policies designed to help disadvantaged individuals. Society is complex, and she fears a simple idea like basic income cannot address life's complexities sufficiently. Because of these numerous questions, she believes no country will actually implement a truly unconditional basic income. Furthermore, while progressives may support basic income because it can eliminate poverty if set high enough, she claims the current social security system could also eliminate poverty if the benefit levels were high enough. However, she fails to acknowledge the implicit screening out process of opt-in, means-tested benefits and the number of eligible claimants who fail to apply for help due to information gaps and time poverty.

Considering a transition from Universal Credit to basic income, she believes the two policies share some goals but ignore the larger social security context. Many benefits address multiple issues, but it is unclear which issues basic income tackles. Further, she worries Universal Credit's slow rollout during the previous government may signal trouble for basic income. However, Universal Credit's delay stems from IT problems that would be less difficult for basic income. Regardless, she cannot see basic income passing in the next five years due to fiscal pressures and a lack of political pressure for basic income, but 10 years could be possible if the economy shifts along with social attitudes. She thinks a massive grassroots campaign would be the best way to convince Labour to adopt the policy, citing the recent success of the tax avoidance movement and

how they timed their pressure well. Interestingly, she believes basic income is an intuitively appealing idea and that those less knowledgeable about social security policy would be more likely to support it, but this conflicts with the Liberal Democrat respondent whose initial reaction was how ludicrous it seemed.

## The Conservative Party

Lady Rhys-Williams (1898-1964) and her son Brandon (1929-1988), a Conservative MP, supported basic income throughout the 20th century (Rhys-Williams, 1943). Moreover, under Ted Heath's leadership as a 'One Nation' Conservative in the 1970s, there existed a willingness to support ideas like tax credits, an NIT, or a partial basic income (Balfour, 2014). Heath's defeat in the 1974 election silenced some 'One Nation' ideas once Thatcher became leader in 1975, although sentiments for basic income persisted, as Keith Joseph wrote to Christopher Balfour in 1975 (Balfour, 2014). Basic income support has continued among prominent Conservatives like Hermione Parker (1989) and David Howell (1986), who served in David Cameron's government from 2010 to 2012 as Minister of State in the Foreign Office. Right now, the Conservatives support Universal Credit. The Conservative (2015) manifesto confirmed their intentions to continue rolling out Universal Credit with expanded conditionality. From the manifesto and their previous five years in government, it seems unlikely the Conservatives would lead any basic income transition.

The Conservative respondent, Christopher Balfour, identified strongly with Heath's 'One Nation' conservatism. He stood and lost as a Conservative parliamentary candidate in Gloucester in 1966, and he actually left the party after Thatcher defeated Heath in the 1975 leadership election, citing difficulties toeing the party line. In 1979, he ran as an independent for a Councillor position and won, thereafter serving in the Forest of Dean Council until 1987. In the 1990s he returned to the Conservative Party as a local canvasser and association member in Winchester. While he holds the 'broad church' ideal of the Conservative Party, which celebrates diversity of opinions, he appears discouraged at the regimented approach to party politics, where party leaders tell its members what to believe and say, rewarding those who do with patronage promises.

Balfour's social security knowledge stems from working as a Councillor and in the Youth Employment Service, where he saw how arduous delivering benefits is while adhering to countless rules and conditions. Within the Conservative Party he holds no influence, partially because he defected in the 1970s. Considering Universal Credit, he considers it a possible step toward basic income, but notes it lacks universality as it tapers as income rises and relies heavily on conditionality. Nevertheless, he finds it more appealing than the previous system. Guessing social security's future is impossible, but he fears the system will continue to move away from face-to-face advising for benefits claimants.

Balfour (2014) wrote a chapter on why he supports basic income in his book *Learning from Difference*. He admires basic income's emancipatory impact—empowering individuals to create instead of consume—and its ability to reward unpaid work and deal with automation. He provides valuable insight into the state of basic income support within the Conservatives; for example, he asked Iain Duncan Smith personally at a Conservative event whether Universal Credit could move towards basic income, receiving a swift no, citing the horror of something-for-nothing policies and losing votes.

Balfour fears a UK basic income is impossible. To implement it, either Labour or the Conservatives must support it. He thinks Labour enjoy directing people more than granting personal freedom and choice, but the Liberal Democrats could support basic income as they previously did, and the Greens already support it but lack political capital. He argues the Conservatives will never support basic



income, but the most likely way for it to happen would be if some young members spend the next few decades working for basic income without mentioning it until they reach influential positions and the Conservatives lose an election, prompting a discussion on new ideas. His frustration with the inability to voice differing opinions is understandable given the lack of national debate on basic income and his identification with 'One Nation' conservatism and the 'broad church' ideal of party politics.

## Discussion

Considering these four interviews, this dissertation parallels Jordan et al.'s (2000) finding that basic income support exists throughout the political spectrum but often from policy actors with limited influence on their parties' social security policy. The Conservative and Liberal Democrat respondents harbour little influence but support basic income, while the Labour respondent holds considerable influence and opposes it. The Green respondent both has influence and supports basic income, but the Green Party's position as an electoral underdog possibly helps explain why basic income supporters became insiders and successfully influenced the party. However, it is disingenuous to claim this dissertation definitively reinforces this finding, as there were only four interviews with non-MP policy actors, a sample too small to claim to prove anything.

As a whole the respondents agree Universal Credit will continue in the immediate future, provided the IT system functions properly, although multiple respondents highlight its ideological adaptability. The respondents from the two smaller parties, the Greens and the Liberal Democrats, critique conditionality further than the Labour respondent, while the Conservative respondent dislikes conditionality but acknowledges his position as an outlier within the party.

The biased selection of interviewees provides a misrepresentation of UK basic income support, as the Liberal Democrat, Conservative, and Green respondents all support basic income. Accepting this bias, their party insights provide useful tools with which to assess the odds of basic income becoming reality soon. While the Green Party already supports basic income, the party next most likely to support it appears to be the Liberal Democrats. The Green, Labour, and Conservative respondents all view the Liberal Democrats as next most likely to support basic income, and they previously supported the policy in the 1990s. Considering this, it is unsurprising the Liberal Democrat and Green respondents claim proportional representation reform would push the basic income debate further along, as these smaller parties would gain more seats under proportional representation. Nevertheless, as the Conservative respondent admits, under the current system basic income cannot succeed Universal Credit without support

from either Labour or the Conservatives. Duverger's Law suggests the UK's first-past-the-post electoral system produces a two-party system (Duverger, 1972), and although the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party (SNP) recently succeeded in denting the dichotomy, a pro-basic income coalition of the Greens, Liberal Democrats, and the regional parties of the SNP and Plaid Cymru (whose unknown stances on basic income deserve further research) would not be enough to succeed. Thus, without a move to proportional representation, the question becomes whether the Conservatives or Labour will support basic income.

Both the Labour and Conservative respondents' interviews cause pessimism among basic income advocates about internal party debates leading to basic income support. While the Labour

respondent, who wields considerable influence, opposes the policy herself, the Conservative respondent, who supports basic income but holds no influence, fears the Conservatives will never support a something-for-nothing policy like basic income. Nonetheless, Leadbeater (2015) believes Labour should adopt basic income as an imaginative idea that could save the party after electoral defeat, supporting the Conservative respondent's claim that the ideal time to propose basic income within the party is after electoral defeat as the party searches for new ideas.

Another way Labour or the Conservatives may support basic income stresses grassroots pressure. The basic income movement has generated increasing dialogue since the Namibian pilot project ended, and it should continue expanding as it gains support from activists, academics from numerous disciplines, and others, citing several reasons for endorsing basic income. The Labour, Green, and Liberal Democrat respondents believe one route to basic income is through a significant grassroots movement that the two main parties cannot ignore.

Both strategies to establish political legitimacy for basic income, through internal party debates and via external public pressure, require careful timing as pressure must be carefully planned to achieve maximum impact, matching Béland's (2005) theory of policy entrepreneurs who propose policy ideas at perfect moments when they can gain the most political support and solve political problems. As public perceptions of welfare

recipients and idleness change and the UK political landscape shifts, policy entrepreneurs could successfully pitch basic income to policy actors, either from inside or outside the political party.

This theory, ideationalism, is one theory of explaining welfare state development, claiming the timely spreading of ideas influences policy outcomes from political institutions (Béland, 2005). Ideationalism critiques historical institutionalism, which claims a historically constructed set of institutional constraints influences the behaviour of political actors and interest groups during the policy-making process, giving little attention to policy ideas themselves (Immergut, 1998). One popular strand of historical institutionalism is path dependence theory, which claims institutional paths that emerged from previous policy decisions constrain and dictate current policy options, leading to conclusions of path departure or stability in specific policy areas (Torfing, 2009). Utilising path dependence theory for this basic income debate yields pessimistic results. Considering the consistent move down a path of welfare-to-work benefits and increased conditionality, a move to an unconditional basic income appears illogical. Another theory of welfare state development is functionalism, which posits welfare reform responds to socio-economic pressures like globalisation and postindustrialism (Myles & Quadagno, 2002). The Labour respondent alluded to functionalism, stating fiscal pressures influence current social security debates, suggesting broader economic context contributes to the policy path taken in social security. Since the Conservatives secured a majority in the election after promises for further austerity and welfare cuts, functionalism appears to have some explanatory power in UK social security policy.

Viewing these three theories of welfare state development, two branches of thinking appear in regards to basic income succeeding Universal Credit. While ideationalism provides a possible explanation for the transition, functionalism and path dependence theory suggest Universal Credit will not transform into basic income—although improving economic circumstances could theoretically accelerate an acceptance of higher spending on social security under functionalism.

Hirsch (2015) acknowledges Universal Credit shares structural similarities to basic income,

and Jordan (2012) argues Universal Credit's insistence on achieving tax- benefit integration, simplification, and work incentivisation could lead the UK along the 'low road' to basic income, supporting Jordan et al.'s (2000) thesis that the UK could stumble through an undesirable policy path toward a participation income followed by a basic income. While basic income advocates likely hope the UK pursues basic income through a path of increased decommodification, Atkinson (2002) also warns about policies like Universal Credit, claiming less than ideal policies could lead to basic income, but he encourages basic income advocates to work with the policy flow to propose basic income at the right times to facilitate policy debates, reinforcing ideationalist arguments.

## Conclusion

Can basic income feasibly succeed Universal Credit in the UK? 21st century labour market restructuring raises important questions about youth unemployment, technological automation, precarious working conditions, wage stagnation, and employer-employee power relations. These problems require fresh thinking; contributory benefits appear old-fashioned since Fordist jobs became more automated and scarce. The UK's response thus far emphasises conditionality and workfare, championing work-first rhetoric as the best poverty solution. Sanctions are being administered increasingly often, forcing claimants into any available jobs. Universal Credit continues to stress conditionality but also seeks admirable goals like tax-benefit integration, system simplification, and work incentives through smooth tapering. However, if Universal Credit remains means-tested and reliant on conditionality, it will remain an inferior solution for the 21st century labour market than a universal basic income.

Basic income maximises work incentives and is affordable if there exists a willingness to increase government revenue or to cut existing programmes. It achieves greater simplicity than Universal Credit, and it fights automation by disassociating income and the labour market, since people would no longer have to work for low wages on zero- hours contracts to receive income. Basic income empowers individuals to take risks and

do what they think is best for their households. Yet, there exists a distinct lack of analogous empirical data on basic income for the UK.

Even if the theoretical argument that basic income better matches 21st century problems than Universal Credit is convincing, it requires political feasibility to happen. Through interviews with policy actors from the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party, the Labour Party, and the Conservative Party, basic income supporters clearly have existed and still exist all across the UK political spectrum, although they rarely influence party policy- making.

For basic income to successfully replace Universal Credit, two scenarios look most plausible. First, inside political parties, basic income supporting members should propose the idea when the party faces electoral defeat and searches for new ideas to reinvigorate their image. Second, outside political parties, a large grassroots movement, if well timed, could pressure the two largest parties, Labour and the Conservatives, who also happen to most oppose basic income, into appeasing the public. These ideationalist approaches are not mutually exclusive; indeed, both may be necessary to make basic income reality. Both require deft policy entrepreneurs who know when to exert pressure on political parties to achieve maximum influence. One such combination could be a hypothetical scenario where Labour or the Conservatives lack a working majority after an election and seek to

form a coalition with smaller parties (who are more likely to support basic income). A grassroots basic income movement would prove crucial as parties discuss which manifesto promises to include in the coalition agreement. If all the smaller parties (perhaps the Greens, Liberal Democrats, the SNP, and Plaid Cymru) hypothetically supported basic income, such internal and external pressure could create a serendipitous agreement marking a path departure to basic income.

Nevertheless, the transition from Universal Credit to basic income is unlikely, as path dependence theory suggests the UK will continue the path of means-testing, conditionality, and workfare. Further, functionalism implies welfare cuts will continue until the economy improves. As the UK exits a harsh economy, however, could rosier economic circumstances change attitudes about welfare? Current fears that poor people

live lucrative, lavish lifestyles are ludicrous, but an ITV survey on Green Party policies (ComRes, 2015) found 36% support for basic income among UK residents with 40% opposed and 23% unsure, suggesting the public may not oppose basic income as vehemently as one might initially believe. Public opinion on welfare can shift, and such changes could make basic income plausible.

As global momentum for basic income continues through upcoming pilot projects in Finland and the Netherlands, analogous basic income data should exist soon. Additional relevant empirical results, a better economy, and more information about basic income could propel inner-party debates and grassroots support to the forefront of UK politics. If so, the UK may yet adequately respond to the challenges facing the future of social security.

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