REFORMING WELFARE
Moving beyond the austerity mentality

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1. Introduction: On not putting people first

Changes to the welfare system carried out by the 2010-2015 coalition government have had an enormous impact on some of the poorest and most disadvantaged people across Britain. We do not know yet what the long-term societal effects will be, but in the USA, where welfare reform was implemented in the late 1990’s, and where the architects of UK welfare reform found their inspiration, evidence has been emerging in recent months and years that there has been an increase in extreme poverty and a decreased life expectancy for claimants.

Sold to the general public as a necessity to make the welfare state affordable, fairer, and more efficient, what gets described as ‘welfare reform’ is in fact creating an ever-expanding group of people for whom the welfare state barely exists, and who are falling through a decreasing safety net in ever greater numbers. The human cost in misery and distress is unquantifiable. The financial cost of the problems caused will be felt in other areas of public spending, but it may be many years before this is recognised or acknowledged. The austerity mentality comes at a huge cost to us all.

By contrast, Ekklesia argues that punitive ‘welfare’ for a huge swathe of people increasingly cut adrift by huge concentrations of wealth and inequality needs to give way to an integrated and publicly funded system of social and economic security which aims to support all citizens to ‘fare well’. Likewise, ‘reform’ should not be used as a cipher for cuts that hit the most vulnerable, or for sweeping away social protection. For some this is a matter of life and death.

The welfare state was in part inspired by Christian thinkers who believed, on the basis of the gospel’s message of universal love, that no-one should end up dependent on charity (including the charity of religious bodies), but rather that social and economic justice founded on sharing, equality, solidarity and a commitment to community well-being required a moral society to organise collectively towards those ends.

This paper critiques moves in both the UK and the USA to undermine such a vision on the basis of unfettered market ideology, ‘small government’, and an attitude of barely veiled, condemnatory contempt for impoverished people and communities.

The larger task is to envision and invest in a truly caring, ‘welfare society’ based on new social and economic partnerships and levers. A society worth believing in.

2. Transatlantic ideology an an engineered crisis for welfare

As the belief in a smaller state began to hold sway across the political spectrum from the 1980s onwards, forcing mainstream parties of all stripes into a homogenizing neoliberal mould, politicians were also faced with the prospect of an ageing population making greater demands on the social security budget – exacerbated by global financial crisis and the decision of elites to opt for neoliberal austerity (making ordinary people pay for the failures of the richest) rather than financial and economic reform aimed at a fairer society.
In their search for savings, apostles of the kind of ‘structural reform’ that would not imperil the elites upon which they had become dependent realised that they could not do anything which would alienate pensioners. Pensioners vote in large numbers, and every voter hopes they will become a pensioner in the future. So pensions and pensioner benefits were and are approached with extreme caution.

This being the case, the UK government saw that the only way to make significant savings would be to whittle away at those benefits which go to the working-age population: the unemployed, the sick and disabled, and the working poor.

To achieve this objective, what is described as welfare reform produced ‘solutions’ to problems that either did not exist, were significantly misconstrued, or were based on the assumption of a shrinking share of resources for social ends in the fifth most prosperous country on the planet. It was, however, necessary to persuade the general public that these problems – caused, they argued, by particularly capable people and communities – did exist. Considerable effort has gone into doing so, with a steady stream of stories in the popular media reinforcing a narrative that says poor people are to blame for poverty.

We are constantly told that vast numbers of people in receipt of working-age benefits are either lazy or dishonest or both, and are sitting at home watching big screen TVs, laughing at the ‘hardworking taxpayers’ financing their ‘lifestyle choice’.

As American write Ashley Sayeau has pointed out, this narrative closely mirrored what had happened in the USA prior to the introduction of their big welfare reforms. “Ronald Reagan would talk about a ‘welfare queen’ who drove her Cadillac from benefit office to benefit office, making false claims.” The message was simple and David Cameron and Nick Clegg seem to know it well: poverty is due not to embedded social inequalities but to the moral failings of individuals.

The media certainly played its part in whipping up hostility towards benefit claimants. Daniel Sage, a PhD student at Stirling University, studied the use of negative terminology used to refer to claimants in the national press. His finding were dramatic. Between 2009 and 2010, the annual media use of the term ‘scrounger’ jumped from 291 to 902, the use of ‘benefit cheat’ increased from 277 to 693 and ‘benefit fraud’ from 299 to 530. The perpetuation of this terminology across the media has continued through to the election campaign in 2015.

Consequently, when the coalition government took power in 2010, the public was well primed to believe that much of the social security budget was being wasted on an army of scroungers and cheats, even though official data on welfare fraud indicates that it is just 0.7 per cent of total benefit expenditure. The banking crisis and a preoccupation with the government’s annual deficit (actually very small compared to household and private – financial and non-financial – debt) also helped to create a sense of urgency. There was ‘no alternative’ to deep cuts. So when Iain Duncan Smith was appointed Secretary of State for Work and Pensions his predetermined agenda to slash welfare undoubtedly hit the ground running.
3. Ian Duncan Smith and the developing anti-welfare agenda

With the Centre for Social Justice, (CSJ) the think-tank he founded in 2004, Duncan Smith had been designing a complete overhaul of the welfare and social security system. The CSJ’s influence on policy has been so strong that on 4th September 2014, Steve Webb MP, Minister of State for Pensions, was reported as saying at a CSJ Conference, “I’m a Minister at DWP a fully owned subsidiary of the CSJ”. The underlying thinking behind this agenda also had cross-party support, and a certain amount of religious legitimation from those Christians with an investment in charity rather than statutory provision and a paternalistic, somewhat judgemental view of ‘the poor’.

Just as the new government’s rhetoric reflected the American approach, buttressed by a rather more explicit and ideological religious right, so did the policy. Ashley Sayeau again (ibid): “[T]he coalition seems to be taking as its model a welfare reform bill passed in America in 1996. Called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRA), the law, through sanctions and benefit limits, removed the last safety net for millions of poor Americans.”

Tom Slater, Senior Lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Edinburgh comments: “Given that the CSJ ‘Economic Dependency’ working group ‘went to the United States to talk to the architects of American welfare reform’, and that Larry Mead (the scholarly influence behind workfare policies in the United States) was invited to Downing Street to advise the Coalition government on work policies immediately after it was formed in May 2010, it is unsurprising that on the launch of his Bill IDS [Iain Duncan Smith] used the American idiom, “play ball or it’s going to be difficult.”

Professor Larry Mead calls his philosophy a ‘new paternalism’. Duncan Smith’s belief that poverty and social problems are rooted in the behaviour of the poor, not an unjust economy, resonates strongly with mainstream ‘welfare reformers’ in the UK.

On its website the Centre for Social Justice says, “As Conservative Party leader Iain Duncan Smith spent time in many of the UK’s most disadvantaged communities, with people whose lives were blighted by social breakdown and the poverty it created” (our emphasis).

This assumption, that social breakdown creates poverty, rather than the other way around, has been key to the work of welfare reformers. It negates the need for even contemplating any redistribution of wealth, and explains why the people involved in this particular school of social justice have very little to say on the subject of inequality.

Portraying social breakdown and bad behaviour as the cause of poverty justifies cutting or freezing benefits, and leads to stories like this from the Daily Mail, ‘Why higher benefits won’t solve child poverty: Duncan Smith says addict parents will ’waste cash on drink and drugs’. The article goes on to claim: “Parental addiction, not income, is main reason for child poverty. Even ’an extra pound’ could push families further into difficulties if money is spent on drugs and alcohol, Iain Duncan Smith warns.”
This extraordinary claim, that parental addiction is the main cause of child poverty, was explained thus: “Mr Duncan Smith said government polling showed people think having a parent addicted to drugs or alcohol is the most important factor for a child growing up in poverty.”

This is a classic example of what has been called ‘policy-based evidencing’ – getting the facts to fit the assumption and ideology, as distinct from evidence-based policy.

4. The contradictions of ‘welfare reform’

In its current guise, what is called ‘welfare reform’ seems to contain within it a number of significant contradictions. While principally being espoused by politicians who generally believe in a smaller state coupled with individual freedom and responsibility with a social tinge, it means in practice that the Department of Work and Pension (DWP), ever more owned by governing ideology, becomes ever more involved in micro-managing the lives of the poor and disadvantaged in punitive and restrictive ways.

Through Universal Credit, ‘conditionality’ will be extended to those who are in work but on a low income and still need support. Low paid workers will face pressure to increase their earnings, and possible sanctions to their benefits if they fail to fulfill the requirements.

While pushing ‘digital by default’, and planning huge cuts to staff, there are, paradoxically, moves to get the DWP involved in the most sensitive and intimate areas of a person’s life, with plans to deliver mental health treatment through Jobcentres.

There are also proposals to cut benefits for people with drug or alcohol problems, or who are obese, if they are unwilling to be coerced into treatment.

All this means that the people most in need of support from the welfare state are increasingly reluctant to seek help. It has driven people off benefits, but not necessarily into work. Whatever money is saved, the costs will undoubtedly pop up elsewhere either in social disruption or in public spending, whether it be the NHS dealing with deteriorating physical and mental health, or the police dealing with what is now termed ‘survival crime’.

It is important to note that ‘welfare reform’ can indeed be reclaimed in a positive way, as our allies in the Centre for Welfare Reform are clearly demonstrating. As Dr Simon Duffy says, “the welfare state is a good thing, it's just designed wrong - let's make it better.” He adds: “We are working on a variety of projects to develop social innovations, redesign the welfare state and promote social justice.”
5. The corrosive consequences of welfare reform in the USA

Given that current UK welfare changes have been inspired by those implemented in the USA, it would perhaps be useful to see what the effect has been there, now that almost twenty years have passed.

In 1996 President Clinton ended Aid to Families with Dependent Children, (AFDC) and replaced it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The new programme placed limits on welfare spending, prevented parents from receiving funds for more than five years, and required recipients to enroll in “workfare” programmes. It had damaging results and yielded only selective savings.

The issues are longstanding. In 2002 a study found that earnings for people entering employment from the new programme were about 15% lower compared to when recipients left the previous system. This seems to have been mirrored in the UK, as wages fell and sanctions ensured that people were obliged to take any job, however low the pay.

More worryingly, several studies have found that welfare reform has led to decreased life expectancy for those affected. As the Washington Post reported, academic studies found that welfare reform increases mortality among recipients, reducing life expectancy by about nine months.

Looking at a welfare-to-work programme in Florida, it was found that, “participants in the program experienced a 16 percent higher mortality rate than recipients of traditional welfare. If our results are generalizable to national welfare reform efforts, they raise questions about whether the cost savings associated with welfare reform justify the additional loss of life.”

Overall, “extreme poverty — defined as households living on less than $2 per day per person — grew greatly after welfare reform's passage.”

In 2012, as Iain Duncan Smith’s Welfare Reform Act began its journey into UK law, American Diana Spatz a single mother who studied for a degree whilst on welfare wrote a piece in The Nation entitled ‘The End of Welfare As I Knew It’.

She declared: “Fifteen years of welfare reform, and what do we have to show for it? Poverty is at its highest level in nearly twenty years. The number of children living in deep poverty—in families with income less than 50 percent of the poverty line—is at its highest level in thirty-five years.”

In April 2012, Jason DeParle wrote a long piece in the New York Times, in which he described how welfare reform was declared a success very early.

“There is over,” President Clinton said a year after signing the law, “Welfare reform works.” As DeParle says, ‘the image of success formed early and stayed frozen in time.’ As problems emerged, most supporters refused to acknowledge them. Ron Haskins of the Brookings Institution who helped draft the law told DeParle he worried that it may have increased destitution amongst the most disadvantaged
families. “This is the biggest problem with welfare reform, and we ought to be paying attention to it….we have what appears to be a big problem at the bottom.”

He added, “This is what really bothers me: the people who supported welfare reform, they’re ignoring the problem.”

In 2013 UNICEF compiled a league table of child wellbeing in 29 developed countries and said: “The bottom four places in the table are occupied by three of the poorest countries in the survey, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania, and by one of the richest, the United States.”

One study pointed out that the US government was quite prepared to invest in expensive public safety measures in areas like transport, to save relatively few lives, but were not prepared to spend the same money to save or prolong lives through welfare assistance.

There does seem to be a real moral objection, both in the USA and the UK, to the government redistributing resources directly to poor people. It seems that there is no limit to the resources that will be spent by government, often via the private sector, on schemes to assess, monitor and ‘nudge’ the poor, but a real antipathy towards simply giving them that money directly in the form of income support.

In 2013 the Rev Paul Nicholson of Taxpayers Against Poverty expressed his frustration at this approach, when responding to the CSJ report ‘Maxed Out: Serious personal debt in the UK’.

He said: “[I]ncomes must be raised to meet a minimum cost of living in order to prevent poverty related debts and their consequent ‘corrosive impact’. An otherwise very useful report is spoilt by “This vision rested on recognizing that using money alone to combat disadvantage, as important as income is, is too narrow an approach”. There is a point at which money alone must combat disadvantage and prevent debt.”

6. Welfare reform as implemented in the UK

As his Welfare Reform Bill passed into law on 8 March 2012, becoming the Welfare Reform Act, Secreatry of State Iain Duncan Smith said it would bring about “the biggest reforms for 60 years”, and would “fundamentally change people’s lives”.

Child Poverty Action Group provided a concise summary of the changes that were about to occur.

We will now address some of the key changes, looking at the assumptions and evidence they were based on, and assessing whether they achieve their stated aims.

a) Universal Credit and its problems

The flagship policy of welfare reform, Universal Credit, was outlined in the CSJ’s 2009 paper, ‘Dynamic Benefits: Towards Welfare that Works’. Written by what was interestingly termed the ‘Economic Dependency Working Group’ as part of the
Breakthrough Britain programme, it was published in association with Oliver Wyman, an international management consulting firm.\textsuperscript{37}

The opening sentence of ‘Dynamic Benefits’ declared: “Our benefits system is broken. Although it alleviates financial hardship, it does so at a price. High benefit withdrawal rates trap millions in worklessness and dependency, often over several generations.”

This reflects Iain Duncan Smith’s starting point and primary motivation: his belief that a ‘culture of worklessness’, with various social problems like addiction and family breakdown, were not just problems for the welfare state to deal with: they were actually caused or exacerbated by the welfare state.

This was summed up in the phrase ‘Broken Britain’. In IDS’ worldview, it was not primarily a lack of jobs or an unfair distribution of wealth that caused poverty, but a benefits system that did not incentivise people to find work, and made living on benefits a desirable ‘lifestyle choice’ for a section of the population.

The belief in several generations of worklessness in the same family came to be widely accepted and was often used as a key justification for welfare reform.

However, in December 2012 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation conducted research in Glasgow and Middlesbrough.\textsuperscript{38} Despite ‘dogged searching’ in areas of high unemployment they found:

\textit{Even two generations of complete worklessness in the same family was very rare. There was no evidence of ‘a culture of worklessness’ – values, attitudes and behaviours discouraging employment and encouraging welfare dependency – in the families taking part in the research. Working-age offspring remained strongly committed to conventional values about work and were keen to avoid the poverty and worklessness experienced by their parents.}

At the time ‘Dynamic Benefits’ was published, ONS Labour Market Statistics showed\textsuperscript{39} that there were 2.47 million people unemployed, and 434,000 job vacancies. With 5.69 jobseekers for every job vacancy, it is difficult to understand how or why ‘worklessness’ can be seen as a cultural problem, rather than an economic one. Or why the ‘Economic Dependency Working Group’ was not called a ‘Labour Market Failure’ working group.

As the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) has shown, the numbers receiving out of work benefits are a reflection of our economic health as a country, not a reflection of the laziness or dishonesty of the population.\textsuperscript{40}

However, Universal Credit was quite openly intended to change the behaviour of benefit claimants, who were regarded as lacking in motivation or responsibility. As with much welfare reform it appears to be based on the assumption that those on the lowest incomes are most irresponsible and worst at budgeting, when in fact the very opposite is often the case. Their budgets have no margin for error. It also assumes that people claiming benefits have made a career of it, and are strangers to the world of work. Yet the increasingly casual and insecure nature of employment in the UK
means that many claimants are in and out of work on a regular basis. They may need support, but they do not need to be taught responsibility by people who may be far more privileged and have had to contend with far fewer difficulties in life.

While everybody now knows that Universal Credit is currently years behind schedule and still only able to process the simplest of claims, very few people know the truth of how far it has gone over budget. The costs are veiled in secrecy, and will not be revealed until after the 2015 General Election.41

In fact the project is in such trouble that the Labour Party has formed a ‘universal credit rescue committee’ and says that if it forms the next government it will ‘pause’ Universal Credit to decide if it is feasible to continue.

Despite all the problems with delivery, there has been a cross-party consensus on the general idea of Universal Credit, with all main parties agreeing that simplifying the benefits system, and ‘making work pay’ could only be a good thing. However, it is now facing increasing criticism from various organisations which have looked closely at the details and identified numerous problems.

Universal Credit will be paid on a monthly basis. Iain Duncan Smith says that this will teach people the responsibility they need to manage a monthly salary. This seems to assume that people who need to claim UC won’t have worked previously, and that all jobs pay monthly. But as Daniel Pacey, who took part in a promotional video for Universal Credit, now says:42

*In my experience, most low-paid jobs pay weekly or every other week, not monthly. You can't make small sums of money last a month. It's not about dependency, it's about living, being able to get a bus to go to the job centre. The government needs to rethink this.*

It also means that from first making a claim it could be several weeks before any payment is received. Very few people on low incomes have any savings, so how they will survive this initial period is not clear.

The housing element of UC which replaces Housing Benefit will be paid direct to the tenant, not the landlord as is often the case now. Alan Ward, chair of the Residential Landlords Association, wrote a piece for the *New Statesman* magazine43 in which he pointed out that for tenants who have been transferred to Universal Credit there has been an increase in rent arrears, and:

*To make matters worse, even when a tenant reaches 8 weeks of arrears, the Department for Work and Pensions still does not provide any assurances that benefit payments will be made direct to the landlord, leaving open the prospect of arrears building for an indefinite period. In short, the current system is needlessly putting tenancies in jeopardy.*44

For sick and disabled people, who are already more likely to be living in poverty, and have been hardest hit by welfare reform and cuts to public services, Universal Credit poses many potential problems, as revealed in a report by Citizens Advice Bureau.45 The analysis indicates, for instance, that:
There is a very significant reduction in the financial support for seriously ill or disabled people who live on their own or just with dependent children and don’t have a carer. Those who have income such as an occupational pension will be no better off as a result of having previously worked.

Disability Rights UK published its own report, pointing out that, “100,000 disabled children stand to lose up to £28 a week. 116,000 disabled people who work will be at risk of losing up to £40 per week from help towards additional costs of being disabled.”

Concerns have also been raised that Universal Credit will make women at risk of domestic abuse more vulnerable. For couples, all payments will be made into one bank account, although people can request an ‘alternative payment arrangement’, which the DWP will consider ‘on a case by case basis’.

Parliament’s Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR), in its recent report ‘Violence against women and girls’, reported:

Women’s Aid argued that payment into a joint bank account could leave a victim vulnerable if the male controlled the bank account. They also said ‘that in practical terms asking for a split payment could put survivors of domestic violence at risk. Even if the perpetrator does not have to agree to a split, it is likely to become obvious that the payment has reduced (because of the size of the award). If this is only done in cases of financial or other abuse, this could put the survivor at greater risk of further abuse.’

The DWP appears deaf to all such concerns. As the JCHR states plainly:

In our December 2011 Report we recommended that the Welfare Reform Bill, now the 2012 Act, ‘be amended to allow payments for children to be labelled as such and be paid to the main carer.

The Government argued, however, that it was not possible to accept this recommendation because of the way that Universal Credit is structured. It is also our understanding that automatic payment of the whole Universal Credit to the mother (as opposed to the main carer) in couples with children, as recommended by Women’s Aid, would not be lawful. We are also concerned that it may be counterproductive if it creates resentment among men.

We do not accept the Minister’s assurance that the situation is satisfactory because problems have not yet emerged during the early roll-out of Universal Credit. The rollout has only recently been extended to couples with children, the group arguably at greatest risk. On the principle that prevention is better than cure, we do not believe that the ‘wait and see’ approach that the Minister recommended is a responsible one, given the concerns raised by women’s organisations about the possible risk to some women.
Traditionally payments for children, such as Child Benefit, have been paid to the main carer, usually the mother. Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector has declared:

*The introduction of Universal Credit is of concern as all household benefits will be paid to one individual, meaning that women could lose independent income if they stay at home or work part-time while their partner becomes the main “breadwinner”. Concern is expressed over concentrating all of the financial resources and power in the hands of one person, which may result in unequal sharing. Worryingly, less household income could be spent on children as women are more likely to spend money on children’s needs than men.*

Universal Credit is attractive to politicians and bureaucrats because it looks like a shiny new streamlined system, but as Professor John Hills of the London School of Economics has written:

*The complexity of people’s lives makes attempts to simplify the benefits system sound attractive, but that very complexity makes ‘simplification’ fraught with difficulty, threatening to make things even harder to cope with for people with little margin for errors – their own or those of official systems.*

It seems that UC has been designed by professional middle class people who are familiar with stable employment and a monthly salary. Will it cope logistically with the reality of casual, insecure employment which makes incomes variable and haphazard?

But the intention of Universal Credit to change the behaviour of claimants will apply not just to the unemployed, who have received dwindling public sympathy. It will also apply to those in low-paid and part-time work. They too will become subject to conditionality and the sanctions regime. It will be interesting to see how the public reacts to this.

As Nigel Keohane of the Social Market Foundation explained in February 2015:

*Universal Credit will offer much weaker financial incentives for people to increase their hours. For this reason, the government is introducing ‘in-work conditionality’, which will seek to push people to earn more through taking on more hours at the same job, an additional part-time job or higher hourly wages. This is a leap in the dark and policy remains very sketchy.*

In 2014 Inside Housing reported:

*Under the present system housing benefit is paid direct to landlords and sanctions can only be applied to out-of-work benefits, such as jobseeker’s allowance or employment support allowance.*

*However, the Department for Work and Pensions has confirmed to Inside Housing that under the government’s flagship welfare reform, where a tenant is working less than 35 hours a week at minimum wage and is not eligible for JSA or ESA, the housing element can be sanctioned instead.*
Universal Credit, which will affect eight million households, clearly has the potential for causing chaos.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{b) The use of sanctions}

In December 2012 a tougher regime of benefits sanctions was introduced, and since then the number of sanctions applied has risen steadily, with 18 percent of Jobseekers Allowance claimants sanctioned in 2013/14.\textsuperscript{57}

While the government repeatedly denies that there are targets or policies for imposing sanctions,\textsuperscript{58} there is plenty of evidence of Jobcentre league tables, with staff coming under pressure to increase sanctions to improve their position in the tables.\textsuperscript{59}

The effect of the increasingly harsh and inflexible sanctions regime seems to have been entirely negative and unjust. Hardest hit are invariably the most disadvantaged people. In 2013 Homeless Link\textsuperscript{60} found that 31 percent of homeless people on Jobseekers Allowance had been sanctioned, leading some to turn to crime to survive. Reports in 2014 and 2015 have continued to confirm this.\textsuperscript{61}

Disturbingly, people in the Work Related Activity Group of Employment and Support Allowance (which means they are currently unfit to work due to a physical or mental health problem or disability) are heavily sanctioned.

In January 2015, after submitting a Freedom of Information request to the Department of Work and Pensions, the Methodist Church discovered that in March 2014,\textsuperscript{62} the most recent figures available, 4,500 people receiving ESA because of a mental health problem had been sanctioned.\textsuperscript{63}

The primary reason for sanctions is being late for or missing an appointment. Paul Morrison, Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church, said:

\textit{Sanctioning someone with a mental health problem for being late for a meeting is like sanctioning someone with a broken leg for limping. The fact that this system punishes people for the symptoms of their illness is a clear and worrying sign that it is fundamentally flawed.}\textsuperscript{64}

Paul Farmer, the CEO of Mental Health charity Mind, commented:

\textit{Stopping benefits does not help people with mental health problems back into work. In fact, it often results in people becoming more anxious and unwell and this makes a return to work less likely. Sanctions are based on a false assumption that individuals lack motivation and willingness to work, but it’s the impact of their illness and the environment in which they are expected to work which actually present the toughest challenges.}\textsuperscript{65}

And of course, when a person’s already meagre income is reduced or stopped altogether, they very quickly go hungry. Emergency Use Only’, a report issued by the foodbank charity The Trussell Trust in November 2014,\textsuperscript{66} highlighted benefit sanctions as a major problem and concluded:
The experiences of the food bank users in this study reveal important truths about the impact of problems with our benefit system on some of the most vulnerable people in our society. The very real challenges faced by these people are too often being compounded – rather than assisted – by their experience of the benefit system, and by policy choices regarding the support offered to people who are out of work or who cannot work.67

In January 2015 Dr David Webster of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at Glasgow University, wrote:

Benefit sanctions are an amateurish, secret penal system which is more severe than the mainstream judicial system, but lacks its safeguards. It is time for everyone concerned for the rights of the citizen to demand their abolition.68

He continues: ‘Sanctions’ are almost entirely a development of the last 25 years. The British political class has come to believe that benefit claimants must be punished to make them look for work in ways the state thinks are a good idea. Yet the evidence to justify this does not exist. A handful of academic papers, mostly from overseas regimes with milder sanctions, suggest that sanctions may produce small positive effects on employment. But other research shows that their main effect is to drive people off benefits but not into work, and that where they do raise employment, they push people into low quality, unsustainable jobs.

This research, and a torrent of evidence from Britain’s voluntary sector, also shows a wide range of adverse effects. Sanctions undermine physical and mental health, cause hardship for family and friends, damage relationships, create homelessness and drive people to Food Banks and payday lenders, and to crime. They also often make it harder to look for work. Taking these negatives into account, they cannot be justified.

The stress piled onto claimants by ever-stricter conditionality has resulted in a deterrent effect: one has to wonder whether this was the intention all along. 69

In January 2015 there were 1,914,000 people unemployed, and just 867,700 claiming Jobseekers Allowance. As the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion explained, ‘Jobseeker’s Allowance off-flow rates for JSA claimants of all durations increased for all durations. Off-flow rates remain at historically high levels’ As the system becomes ever harsher and more punitive, the deterrent effect increases and people disappear from the system. The government seems to have no curiosity about how these people are surviving.

On 3 February 2015 Ekklesia associate Bernadette Meaden put out a message via social media: “Please RT if you know anyone unemployed, sick or disabled and not claiming the benefits they need because they can't cope with the system.” In a short period it had 167 re-tweets. There is plenty of anecdotal as well as research evidence to indicate a change. With welfare reform the benefits system has become a source of intense stress and anxiety for many people who rely on it to survive. Those who cannot cope with the stress have felt it necessary to drop out, relying on family and friends and sometimes crime to scrape by.
c) Mistreatment of sick and disabled people

As with unemployment, so with sickness and disability. Ian Duncan Smith strongly believed that people on Incapacity Benefit had been ‘parked’ and were ‘languishing’. Many were able to work but were ‘trapped’ on benefits, not motivated to seek suitable employment.

However, a report by the Scottish Observatory for Work and Health suggested this was not an accurate portrayal of the situation. According to the DWP’s own figures, whilst the total numbers of people receiving Incapacity Benefit may have remained fairly stable, it was not a static figure, not an unchanging block of the same people.

There was a constant ‘on flow’, as people became ill or had an accident, and a constant ‘off flow’, as people recovered and returned to the labour market. The report looked at the figures for 2008. In that year, out of a total of 2,630,560 people receiving Incapacity Benefit, 542,910 people flowed on to the benefit, whilst 654,560 people flowed off. Quite clearly, for many people, claiming Incapacity Benefit was a temporary measure to see them through a period of illness or disability.

Reformers also pointed to the geographic variation in numbers of IB claimants, to imply that in certain areas of the country, being ‘on the sick’ had become an established culture, a lifestyle choice. In November 2011, Christina Beattie and Steve Fothergill’s report, ‘Incapacity Benefit Reform’, explained:

That does not mean fraudulent claims were widespread. Rather, the medical threshold for access to incapacity benefits was set at a level that allowed substantial numbers of men and women with health problems or disabilities to claim incapacity benefits instead of unemployment benefits. Also, at various times Jobcentre Plus and its predecessors encouraged claimants to move across to incapacity benefits. The effect was to hide the scale of labour market distress in Britain’s weaker local economies.

Until at least the mid-2000s the key players were often happy to collude in the diversion onto incapacity benefits. Governments were happy that it reduced the numbers on unemployment benefits and made their economic policies appear more successful. Companies were happy because it absolved them of the responsibility to employ men and women with health problems or disabilities.

But in the new millennium, with working-age benefits targeted for cuts, the suspicion began to be expressed that amongst IB claimants, a high proportion were actually quite capable of work. This led to New Labour’s introduction of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) for new claimants in 2008.

In 2011 the Coalition government went further, and decided to extend the WCA to all existing claimants, against expert advice.

This decision triggered the reassessment of over two million sick and disabled people by the private contractor Atos. The responsibility for claimants possibly receiving an inappropriate benefit was placed, not with the political and economic forces that may have engineered that situation, but with the individual claimants with disabilities or health problems.
At the time, Beatti and Fothergill estimated that, “by 2014 the reforms will cut incapacity claimant numbers by nearly one million, of which more than 800,000 will be existing incapacity claimants who will lose their entitlement. These figures are based on experience in the areas where the reforms have been piloted and on the DWP’s own assumptions about the impact of the reforms.”

So, if the DWP’s assumptions were correct, if the policy was soundly based, and implementation had gone according to plan, we would now be able to see a drop of one million in the numbers of people claiming Incapacity Benefit or Employment Support Allowance. What has happened in reality? According to the DWP Statistical Summary, “The Employment and Support Allowance / incapacity benefits (ESA/IB) early estimate for November 2014 is 2.520 million.” That is a reduction from the 2008 figure, when the WCA was introduced, of 110,000.

Nick Dilworth, a welfare rights adviser who analyses DWP statistics, points out that between 2004 and 2008, prior to the Work Capability Assessment being introduced, numbers on Incapacity Benefit fell by 179,450, meaning that the WCA can only be viewed as a colossal waste of money and effort.

Up to March 2014, which are the most recent figures we have available, 4.8 million Work Capability Assessments had been conducted. Whilst the numbers receiving IB/ESA has been only marginally altered by this enormous effort and expense, the element of uncertainty it introduced into the lives of people who are sick or disabled cannot be overstated. Many live in fear of a re-assessment which may remove their support, against the advice of the doctors who know them best.

Benefits and Work, an information service for claimants, recently surveyed its users about how they feel under the current regime. After receiving thousands of responses it concluded:

*The absolutely overwhelming message is that financial insecurity combined with continual attacks in the media, have left sick and disabled claimants feeling frightened, persecuted and, in some cases, suicidal.*

Comments from respondents included:

“I live with a permanent feeling of threat, from a bullying, harassing system that seems almost designed to shorten the lives of disabled folk. I am very frightened of what the future holds in terms of my financial security.”

**d) An unjust Bedroom Tax**

Another change sold as a ‘reform’ introduced in the 2012 Act was the ‘Under-Occupancy Penalty’ commonly known as the Bedroom Tax. Tenants in social housing have Housing Benefit restricted to the number of bedrooms allowed under the Local Housing Allowance criteria. For example, a couple living in a two bedroom flat would be deemed to have a spare bedroom and their Housing Benefit would be reduced accordingly. A couple with two children in a three bedroom house could be
deemed to have a spare bedroom, as all children under ten and children under sixteen of the same gender are required to share a room.

Supporters of this measure justified it on grounds of fairness, because Labour had introduced a similar rule for tenants in the private rented sector. However, there was one crucial difference. In the private sector, it had been phased in for new tenants: existing tenants were unaffected unless they chose to move home. In the social sector, the bedroom tax was imposed on all existing tenants, telling many thousands that their home was too big for them, and they would have to either make up the shortfall in their Housing Benefit, or find a smaller home.

What seemed to have been disregarded was the fact that, as social sector housing is allocated by prioritising need, amongst tenants in the social sector there was a high percentage of people with a long-term illness or disability. ‘Spare’ rooms may be housing a dialysis machine, oxygen concentrator, or other equipment. Or for couples, one person may need a hospital bed, so their partner would need their own bedroom.

Despite the Prime Minister stating more than once in the House of Commons that disabled people were exempt from the bedroom tax, this was simply not the case. Ministers said that disabled people affected could apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment, but the funding available was manifestly inadequate.

In July 2013 The Papworth Trust reported that “9 in 10 disabled people are cutting back on food or bills to pay the bedroom tax if they are refused a safety-net housing payment.”

National Housing Federation Chief Executive David Orr commented: “These shocking figures show that the bedroom tax is doing just what we feared - unfairly punishing the most vulnerable people in our society.”

Another justification for the bedroom tax was that it would free up larger homes for families that needed them, making more efficient use of housing stock. But the people most likely to be under-occupying family homes were pensioners whose families had left home, and pensioners were the only demographic that was exempt from the bedroom tax. So a pensioner could remain in a three or four bedroom home and remain unaffected, whilst a working-age disabled person in a two bedroom home would have to find the extra money, move out, or get into rent arrears.

The bedroom tax also created a big demand from single people and couples for one bedroom accommodation, but that is extremely rare in the social housing sector, which is dominated by family homes. What has happened in reality is that many poor people have simply become poorer, because they can’t downsize, and family homes have been left empty because nobody can afford to rent them.

In August 2013, after a Freedom of Information request to Local Authorities, The Independent reported that 96% of people affected by the bedroom tax had nowhere to move to.

Louise Harding, head of tenant services at the Coast and Country Housing association in Redcar, said in one of their worst-hit areas there were 53 three-bedroom properties
empty and queues of people desperate to downsize. “It’s appalling,” she said. “We’ve got 1,100 people wanting to downsize to a one-bedroom property and on average we only have around 30 available every year. At this rate it will take 37 years for all those people to get one-bedroom homes. The iniquity of it is shocking; this about money-making.”

The chief executive of Citizens Advice, Gillian Guy, said: “This is an upside-down approach to policy-making which doesn’t get to the root cause of why housing benefit costs have increased. We have a chronic shortage of affordable housing in the UK with over 1.8 million households on waiting lists. As long as this dire lack of housing options exists then the Government can’t reasonably tell people they have a choice about downsizing to a smaller home.”

Section 70 of the Welfare Reform Act abolished the Discretionary Social Fund (i.e. crisis loans and community care grants). Responsibility was passed to Local Authorities, but the funding allocated was inadequate and not ring-fenced. As local authorities saw their budgets slashed and need increased, it is hardly surprising that it became ever more difficult to get help from these funds.

As Michael Dixon, a foodbank volunteer in Newcastle upon Tyne, noted: “[When] emergency hardship loans were devolved from the department of work and pensions, Newcastle City Council were given £150,000 less than they needed to cover [these] loans”… “So [the council] reclassified what a crisis was. A crisis now officially is loss of home through fire or flood, others may apply.” In the era of welfare reform, having no money, no food, and no heating may not be seen as a crisis worthy of help from public funds.

e) A punitive benefit cap

As for the Benefit Cap, which hits families with children in areas where housing costs are high, there is no evidence that this is making any significant saving for the public purse. But as the Centre for Social and Economic Inclusion has found:

\[\text{The cap is, however, having a huge impact on those households subject to it, and the 100,000 children who live in them. We have done extensive research on the cap, interviewing those affected both before and after its implementation in London and the South East. We’ve found that the overwhelming response of families has been to cut back, to go without (on food and heating), to run up debts and – often – to fall back on discretionary support from the public purse or charities and faith groups. Many have looked for work, far fewer have found it – not surprising, given that two thirds of families affected are headed by lone parents, many with pre-school children.}\]

\[\text{Where parents have found work, it’s often been no mean feat – with older children left looking after younger ones, and parents taking anything going if it adds up to enough to re-start their benefits. Indeed our work for Brent Council has shown that where households do successfully escape the cap, their income from benefits increases - by on average £200 per week. Again this isn’t surprising, given that the bill is being driven mainly by sky-high rents rather than ‘out of work’ benefits.}\]
7. New directions: from shrunken welfare to ‘faring well’ for all

Present policies and prescriptions for welfare reform driven by the 2010 UK government, and insufficiently questioned by the official parliamentary opposition, have been founded on a number of spurious claims and ill-founded beliefs, as this paper has illustrated. It has pressurised and penalised some of the least fortunate in society, while doing nothing to tackle the systemic drivers of social security expenditure – principally insecure work, low wages and high housing costs. Symptoms have been treated as causes, victims as culprits. We need to start seeing that benefit recipients are not the problem. The problem is an unjust and exploitative economy. Benefits, like foodbanks, simply ameliorate the harm of it and conceal the scale of the injustice.

Ultimately ‘welfare’ should not be a term for a mean, minimal and marginalizing system of social control for the poorest and most vulnerable in a continuingly unequal society. It ought to be an aspiration for everyone, a part of ensuring ‘social security’ for all, rather than wealth for a few, overwork for many, and survival for those at the bottom of an unjust system. As the advocacy network ‘Who Benefits?’, which Ekklesia supports,\(^84\) says in answer to its eponymous question about social support: “we all do”.

Yet we can do better, for sure. Welfare and social security need to be part of a web of economic and social equalization and innovation also involving a basic citizen’s income, a re-invested National Health Service, a rebalanced housing market, a healthy and sustainable environment, tax justice, land reform, the localisation and regionalisation of power and political accountability, socialization of economic and financial relations and institutions, community empowerment, and an ethical shift from possessive individualism to generous mutualism.\(^85\)

That latter shift entails a full-scale practical (and from Ekklesia’s perspective theological) rebuttal of the underlying philosophy of Margaret Thatcher’s ‘Sermon on the Mound’ – most notably the famous (if misquoted) assertion that “there is no such things as society – there are families and individuals…”\(^86\) There is a superficial sense in which ‘Big Society’ and allied notions began that job from a socially conscious ‘conservative innovation’ viewpoint supported by both the Red Tory and Blue Labour thinkers. But in reality, Big Society, which has all but disappeared from the political horizon latterly, turned out to be little more than a series of attempts to shrink (rather than re-found and relocate) government through an extension of voluntarism and the privatization of welfare.\(^87\)

Churches Together in Britain and Ireland are right to speak and develop ideas around a ‘Good Society’ instead,\(^88\) and of course there are huge resources available for rethinking welfare and social security positively out of the Catholic Social Teaching tradition of subsidiarity and the Common Good.\(^89\) There is also a need for more radical Christian thinking as exemplified by the ‘Common Wealth’ statement on economic and social justice that Ekklesia and others supported after the 2010 General Election.\(^90\) In order to re-situate the discourse on welfare, and to produce policies that look towards a new and better social settlement beyond austerity and neoliberal ideology, a fresh theology of human well-being and well-faring on a divided and imperilled planet is needed. One contribution to this is the ecumenical process.
towards an ‘economy of life’, to which we also seek to contribute. Similarly, there is a need for tough thinking about the role of churches and faith bodies in supporting welfare for all, rather than charity for some, in a way that recognises both the aspirations and limits of the thinking of Archbishop William Temple and others in helping to establish the welfare state. Neither a top down market nor a top down state will do for this. What is needed is ground-up, hopeful initiatives in economy, society and governance “as if people mattered”.

FURTHER READING

• ‘Social Security and the ‘Shrinking State’,’ by Savitri Hensman, Ekklesia, 4 May 2015. This paper can be read in tandem with Hensman’s.

• ‘Housing: facing up to an intergenerational challenge’, by Paul Lusk, Virginia Moffatt and Simon Barrow, Ekklesia, 24 April 2015. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21635](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21635)

• ‘Tax Dodging Bill: time for change’, Tax Dodging Coalition / Ekklesia, 29 January 2015, [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21385](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21385)

• ‘Combatting the denial of poverty and inequality’, Paul Nicolson, Taxpayers Against Poverty / Ekklesia, 18 January 2015. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21318](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21318)

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• ‘Beyond the Barriers: ESA, the Work Programme and recommendations for a new system of support’, Spartacus Network / Ekklesia, 8 April 2014. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/beyondbarriers](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/beyondbarriers)

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• ‘People's review of the WCA: further evidence’, Spartacus Network / Ekklesia, 9 December 2013. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/19621](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/19621)

• ‘Truth and lies about poverty, benefits and welfare’, Joint Public Issues Team / Ekklesia, 1 March 2013. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/18086](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/18086)

• ‘Britain’s forgotten children and families’, Children’s Society, Action for Children and NSPCC / Ekklesia, 6 July 2012, [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/16811](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/16811)
• ‘Fair and Square: children in poverty and free school meals’, Children’s Society / Ekklesia, 9 April 2012. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/16555](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/16555)

• ‘Welfare Reform Bill: Financial privilege, constitutional convention, fiscal and second chamber reform implications’, Sue Marsh, Ekklesia, 14 February 2012. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/16280](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/16280)

• ‘Responsible Reform: Changes to Disability Living Allowance’, Spartacus Network / Ekklesia, 8 January 2012. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/responsiblereformDLA](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/responsiblereformDLA)

• ‘Betraying disabled people and welfare’, Karen McAndrew, Ekklesia, 1 May 2011. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/14675](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/14675)

• ‘Engaging the poor in anti-poverty policy making’, Simon Barrow, Ekklesia, 16 April 2011. [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/anti-poverty](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/anti-poverty)


THE AUTHOR

Bernadette Meaden has written about political, religious and social issues for some years, and is strongly influenced by Christian Socialism, liberation theology and the Catholic Worker movement. She is an Ekklesia associate and regular contributor. You can follow her on Twitter: @BernaMeaden Her regular articles, many on themes related to this report, can be found here: [http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/blogs/bernadette-meaden](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/blogs/bernadette-meaden)

Additional contributions, especially to sections 1 and 7, from Ekklesia co-director Simon Barrow, who is a social theologian, commentator and policy adviser.

ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

1 Throughout this document we use the term ‘welfare reform’ with a sense of ambiguity and contradiction – sometimes indicated by the use of parentheses. Like ‘social justice’, both ‘welfare’ and ‘reform’ have been abused by those who have turned ‘welfare’ into a term of opprobrium, and ‘reform’ into a coy synonym for defunding or dismantling. As we note later, the Centre for Welfare Reform has done a good job in reclaiming the terms for something positive and meaningful – innovation and sustainability for social solidarity and inclusion. But it is an uphill semantic struggle.
3 The follow on from Ekklesia’s 2015 General Election focus, ‘Vote for what you believe in’ ([http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21487](http://www.ekklesia.co.uk/node/21487)) is going to be ‘Act for what you believe in’: [http://voteforwhatyoubelievein.org](http://voteforwhatyoubelievein.org)


Centre for Social Justice: http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk. Though CSJ is frequently described as an independent think-tank, it is dominated by conservative thinkers, many with a capital ‘C’, including founder Iain Duncan Smith, Tim Montgomerie (founder of Conservative Home and former director of the Conservative Christian Fellowship), William Hague (former Foreign Secretary and leader of the Conservative Party), Syed Kamall (Conservative MEP and co-founder of the Global Business Research Institute), Natalia Grosvenor (Duchess of Westminster) and Kevin Tebbit (former Director of GCHQ and former Permanent Under Secretary of the Ministry of Defence).

Lucinda Borkett-Jones, ‘How do we tackle poverty? Let CSJ count the ways…’, Christian Today, 4 September 2014. [Lord Glasman, Steve Webb and Oliver Letwin – from the Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative Parties respectively – also took part in a panel discussion at the launch of the CSJ’s ‘Breakthrough Britain’ report]. Note also the role of socially conservative Christians in supporting this agenda.

http://www.christiantoday.com/article/how.do.we.tackle.poverty.let.csj.count.the.ways/40282.htm

Jason Hackworth, Faith Based: Religious Neoliberalism and the Politics of Welfare in the United States (Geographies of Justice and Social Transformation series), University of Georgia Press, 2002. In this illuminating book, Hackworth explores how the religious right has supported neoliberalism in the United States, bringing a particular focus to welfare—an arena where conservative Protestant politics and neoliberal economic ideas come together most clearly. He describes both the theory and practice of faith-based welfare, revealing fundamental tensions between the religious and economic wings of the conservative movement. Hackworth begins by tracing the fusion of evangelical religious conservatism and pro-free market, anti-government activism, which resulted in what he calls “religious neoliberalism.” He argues that neoliberalism—the ideological sanctification of private property, the individual, and anti-statist politics—has rarely been popular enough on its own to promote wide change. Rather, neoliberalists gain the most traction when they align their efforts with other discourses and ideas. The promotion of faith-based alternatives to welfare is a classic case of coalition building on the right. Socially conservative Christians get to provide social services, while opponents of big government chip away at the public safety net. Though religious neoliberalism is most closely associated with George W. Bush’s Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the idea predates Bush and has continued to hold sway in the Obama administration. The situation is quite different in the UK, but socially conservative Christian instincts still point in the direction of voluntaristic charity rather than social provision based on biblical justice.


Amelia Gentleman, ‘Tories discover poverty at last, but is it all in the family?’, Guardian, 5 May 2010 – just before the previous General Election.

The Social Justice Commission established from 1992-1994 by the late Labour Party leader and Christian Socialist John Smith, though reformist, was not inherently deconstructive of welfare priorities in the way that many would perceive the CSJ to be. See Institute for Government archive material and
http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/publications/making-policy-opposition-commission-social-justice-1992-1994 The contrast between the two indicates the very different uses to which the term ‘social justice’ has been put in recent years. There is a sense in which Ekklesia has owned the term in a more thoroughgoing way, leaning towards a different, dissenting Christian tradition identified with Anabaptists, Quakers, radical Catholics and others. See Matthew Lamb, ‘Liberation Theology and Social Justice’, Process Studies, pp. 102-122, Vol. 14, Number 2, Summer 1985, http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2570
24 See the excellent and important projects of the Centre for Welfare Reform (CWR): http://www.centreforwelfarereform.org
26 The authors of ‘Effects of welfare reform’ conclude that the policy changes yielded what may generously be termed mixed outcomes: “Welfare reform may have produced very large direct monetary savings, including returns for both individuals and for the US government. However, TANF may also harm women who could not subsequently work (whether as a result of young children at home, large family size, or mental or physical illness). Some may have ended up relying on weak financial networks or become homeless. Given that higher earnings and employment are thought to be beneficial for health, the observed adverse impacts on the mothers and their children likely occurred solely among these women who could not work and therefore lost their welfare benefits.”
such a huge proportion of the job pertaining to the General Election and issues that will follow it: “One can’t help concluding that, with February 2015.


“Iain Duncan Smith’s universal credit is bad news for tenants and landlords alike – and I should know,” declared Mr Ward in the same article.


Joint Committee on Human Rights (JCHR) report, p147.

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Ibid., p158.

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Nigel Keohane, ‘Universal Credit: Who will speak for the 99.7%?’, Social Market Foundation, 17 February 2015. http://www.smf.co.uk/universal-credit-who-will-speak-for-the-99-7/ He adds, pertaining to the General Election and issues that will follow it: “One can’t help concluding that, with such a huge proportion of the job still to be done, any incoming government will have to make a big
decision early on as to whether to continue with the scheme and, if so, how. At the very least, May 2015 must be the time to focus on the basic tenets of the reform, such as simplification and transparency of work incentives.”

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67 This research, jointly conducted by Oxfam, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), the Church of England and The Trussell Trust, examined why people are turning to food banks, how food bank use fits with their wider coping strategies, and what might be done to reduce the need that leads to food bank use. The research used a combination of methodological approaches. The researchers conducted 40 in-depth interviews with clients at seven food banks in a diverse range of areas across the UK, collected additional administrative data from more than 900 clients at three of those food banks regarding the reasons for their referral, and analysed a caseload of 178 clients accessing an advice service at one food bank.

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warning signs. February 2015: “Youth unemployment is showing a small quarterly rise. There are still 740,000 unemployed young people, and 498,000 (6.8% of the youth population) who are unemployed and not in full-time education.” March 2015: “The actual number of claimants, nationally, rose by 5,400 between January and February, compared to the adjusted fall of 31,000.” April 2015: “Separate data from DWP shows the number of people on ESA rising.”


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Who Benefits? - http://www.whobenefits.org.uk/ Who Benefits? was brought together by charities and other organizations to work with a huge range of people who need support from benefits for different reasons – from finding themselves with nowhere to live, to struggling to make ends meet for their families. Yet too often people who have been helped by benefits get ignored, misrepresented or at worst blamed for their situation. By using people’s real stories, we hope to change that. Ekklesia is a member of the Who Benefits? coalition.
Paul Verhaeghe, ‘Neoliberalism has brought out the worst in us’: An economic system that rewards psychopathic personality traits has changed our ethics and our personalities, Guardian, 29 September 2014. http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/29/neoliberalism-economic-system-ethics-personality-psychopathicstic


Following the launch of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland’s Good Society project on 21 May 2014, CTBI has been looking for communities around the four nations to add their own voices and answer the question: ‘What does a Good Society mean to you?’ They have a toolkit here: https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Good-Society-Toolkit.pdf (*PDF Adobe Acrobat document).

See ‘Catholic Social Teaching: faith in a better world’: http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/principles/


The phrase, of course, is from E. F. Schumacher’s famous Small is beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered (Blond & Briggs, 1973).

ABOUT EKKLESIA

Founded in 2002, Ekklesia is a public policy think-tank that explores the changing nature of the relationship between politics and beliefs in a plural world. Committed to social justice, peacemaking, environmental sustainability and new economy, it seeks to combine transformative Christian thinking about public life with ideas and insights from a range of allies beyond the Christian tradition.

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