

Decent Childhoods

Reframing the fight
to end child poverty

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Foreword

Decent Childhoods: reframing the fight to end child poverty comes out of a lengthy process of discussion and research. I chaired the original seminar in February 2011 when Kate and Jason presented an early draft of the report. Baroness Ruth Lister responded and the debate which followed reached a consensus that Labour's anti-poverty politics had not succeeded in engaging the public and that a radical rethink was required. *Decent Childhoods* is the outcome of that debate. Kate and Jason ask the right questions, and they issue a challenge to create a new politics of poverty. It is going to need one. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has predicted that child poverty will increase by 2020, and that the statutory target to halve child poverty will be missed. The Coalition Government's rapid and radical cuts in public spending not only threaten a new recession, but they will also blight a great many lives.

The word austerity does not do justice to the poverty that will engulf an increasing number of individuals and families. The recession has intensified the efforts of the right to lay the cause for poverty and unemployment on individual behaviour - the poor are those who fail to take up the opportunities they are offered. Labour has not been able to halt this blaming of an apparent feckless underclass; in fact it has sometimes joined in and helped to promote the idea of an undeserving poor. We know that the great majority of people who live in poverty pass through a cycle of low pay and no pay. They are not living in a culture of dependency. Households which have experienced permanent inter-generational unemployment do not exist in any significant numbers. But the facts of poverty are not the same as the politics of poverty. The right wing US academic Lawrence Mead captures the trend when he writes that, "*political dispute centres more and more on questions of personal behaviour, less and less on structural fundamentals.*"

The right blame poverty on individual failings and advocate a moral crusade and individual self-reliance. The left blame structural issues and advocate redistribution. The political failure of the left has been to either avoid the politics of personal responsibility or else to collude with demonising an undeserving poor. Consequently it has lost the argument with the public where a majority view people on benefits in a negative light, but also recognise the need for compassion in protecting the vulnerable. It is paradoxical and we need to find a way of talking about poverty that goes beyond the 'either or' of structural versus personal causes. Poverty is experienced within social relationships that are determined by both individual agency and structure.

Poverty is about material deprivation, it is about not having enough money to lead a decent life. But as Kate and Jason point out material deprivation carries with it the erosion of emotional sustenance; exclusion from the social and cultural mainstream, and a loss of hope.

Poverty and inequality undermine self-esteem. They create an urgent need to consume in order to keep a toehold on the status hierarchy of positional consumer goods and so avoid shame and humiliation. Poverty grinds down personal resilience and can lead to emotional vulnerability, chronic illness and premature death. People are left voiceless and defenceless against the constant undermining of their dignity and value as human beings. Poverty is lived in family and social relationships but I don't think we have managed to find a language of both structure and person that eclipses the 'either or'. We have not been able to articulate the undermining of people's esteem and dignity. We haven't managed to counter people like Lawrence Mead and create an anti-poverty strategy that brings together policies on housing, crime, the labour market, education, neighbourliness and personal responsibility for self-improvement which places people living in poverty at its heart, and which gives them control over what is done in their name. I hope this report begins a debate around this kind of democratic and relational welfare. I grew up in a household whose political hero was the liberation theologian Oscar Romero. If I had to sum up what he stood for it was kindness. He said, "*liberation will arrive only when the poor are the masters of their own struggle for liberation.*"

Jon Cruddas MP October 2011

About the authors

Kate Bell and Jason Strelitz have collaborated as policy advisors and campaigners for several years. Their work has motivated them to take a fresh look at the approach that dominated thinking on child poverty in recent years.

Kate is a freelance policy consultant and was Director of Policy for Gingerbread. She has written widely on child poverty and lone parent issues including *Lone parents and 'mini-jobs'* published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and *The experience of the UK Child Poverty Target* for the Center for American Progress.

Jason works in public health. Among other roles he was previously Policy Advisor for Child Poverty at Save the Children. He received his PhD from the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion at the LSE: among his publications he co-authored *Tackling Poverty and Disadvantage: a twenty year enterprise* for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2003 and *Why Money Matters: income, poverty and children's lives* with Ruth Lister in 2007.

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We are in particular grateful to Jonathan Rutherford who has been an extremely helpful source of ideas and practical help in seeing this project through, and to the Webb Memorial Trust for its support for the project. The trust was formed in 1944 as a memorial to Beatrice Webb. It currently focuses on issues of poverty and inequality within the UK.

Summary

A secure home environment in which a child's development is nurtured with care and attention; opportunities to learn and grow as an individual, and enjoy all our country's richness has to offer; the chance to fulfil ones potential, and to become a self-supporting and collectively-contributing member of adult society.

These building blocks of decent childhoods are not sufficiently available to all. Access to them is not predetermined, but neither is it random. Our social structure patterns the kinds of childhoods that many millions experience.

Most people think that all children should have the life described above. Some believe that the UK is already sufficiently rich in opportunity, offering free education, social security, and 30 million jobs. For those who want it the good life awaits. But many people believe we should do more. The question is then, what exactly should we do?

Labour in Government took a view on this. They set the ambition to "end child poverty", to eliminate this "scar on the nations soul".¹ They embarked on an ambitious programme to achieve this.

Nearly fifteen years since Labour came to power we are confronted by two important questions:

What was achieved and what have we learnt through the approach that Labour took to tackling child poverty?

How has the world changed from the one that Labour sought to shape and what may be the key drivers that impact on this agenda now and in the future?

We are very conscious of this second question. In particular the economic realities are fundamentally different from those that underpinned Labour's approach. We discuss these in our conclusion, as they cannot be ignored. But our focus here is on the first question; we believe there are important messages from 13 years of policymaking that are entirely relevant to the current context.

The goal of ending child poverty galvanised political action and ultimately led to a consensus that saw a once sceptical Conservative Party

sign up to the Child Poverty Act and relative poverty targets on the eve of the 2010 election. Labour's three-pronged approach to tackling poverty also saw significant successes. With large investment in family incomes (primarily through the tax credit system), rates of material deprivation fell dramatically and against a fixed threshold (equivalent to the US poverty line), poverty rates plummeted far more than during the much trumpeted US Welfare reforms under Bill Clinton. At the same time employment rates increased for low income families, particularly lone parents who, buoyed by tax credits, the minimum wage, subsidised childcare and support were able to access work in far greater numbers. Finally, across a wide array of policy initiatives aimed to improve children's life chances there were signs of success, with evidence that child well-being, in comparison to other European countries, was improving at a faster rate.

But it was not a whole-hearted success story. The 2010 target to halve child poverty was not met and the economic and political changes have seen many of the gains appear tenuous and unsustainable. As Kitty Stewart has argued, there is a sense of "a rare opportunity only partly grasped to restructure society in the interests of the poorest children".

Policy focused strongly on getting people into work without thinking about the kind of work that was available. Despite numerous Welfare Reform Acts, there was no Jobs Act.

For most of Labour's time in office the focus was on the situation of those at the bottom. What was happening in the rest of society was relevant to this story only in as much as it provided the resources for investment. Any sense that the impact of inequality would reverberate not just through the income distribution, but through housing, education and broad political attitudes was not on Labour's radar.

While a political consensus formed around the goal, the wider public including those whom the agenda was focussed on, and many who would be likely supporters, barely noticed what was going on. The discourse around the poverty agenda did not resonate widely. Few see themselves as poor in modern Britain, and whilst many recognise problems of inequality and disadvantage few see poverty as a term that applies broadly in the UK context. Yet on any

widely accepted measure of relative poverty very many people are poor at some time in a given few years. The language therefore portrayed a group who few could identify, whilst not speaking to the many it could have done.

This report is an attempt to start addressing these issues that we hope provokes a broader conversation. We argue that an alternative framing of the problem that speaks both to a wider set of solutions and a language that more people can identify with may have the potential to create a stronger framework for political and social action. One such approach could be that of Decent Childhoods; those aspects of childhood that all should have and none should go without. We argue that much of what people care about when talking about child poverty can be expressed in this idea. Our conception of a decent childhood is one in which all children live in families with financial security, all children have meaningful opportunities; and all children are valued. Dignity and the chance to realise one's potential are therefore as important as material wellbeing.

Capability theorists have argued for a focus on the way we live and to see poverty as something that diminishes particular freedoms. Rather than focus our efforts on an analytic concept which requires constant interpretation, perhaps we would be better served by a focus on *"the central and valuable things in life that people can actually do and be"*.²

How could we achieve this vision? There are many drivers of change but we focus on three critical ones. Inequalities in the labour market have driven the distribution of childhood disadvantage today as we have moved from a full employment society to a more polarised one. Secure employment is the foundation stone on which decent childhoods rest and we argue for an active full employment policy. Labour market intervention must work to promote a fairer distribution of the rewards from work, ensure that all have opportunities to participate, and promote a better balance between work and family life.

In the long term educational inequalities will continue to be a major driver of our ability to create a full employment society. Our comparative failure to prepare children for the modern labour market represents a massive waste of talent as well as a failure of social justice. Policies that focus on education must

build secure foundations for learning and focus on universal attainment goals, narrow attainment gaps, and provide second chances for those who have missed out on educational success.

Finally, whilst the world has changed inextricably, those left at the bottom have too often been cast off as a dysfunctional underclass, blamed for their lack of success. We must take a greater sense of shared responsibility; holding politicians to account when they use language that stigmatises those in poverty, designing services that respect the agency and expertise of those who they serve, and seeking to build a campaign on these issues that provides an inclusive call to action.

The Child Poverty Act mandates that government end child poverty by 2020. The world in which that goal will be pursued has changed dramatically since the initial target was set in 1999. At a time of unprecedented fiscal belt tightening, questions like "what more could be done with an extra billion to tackle poverty", feel like from another age. The key public policy question is now how we might emerge from the current economic crisis. We will need a new economic model; all agree that one built on debt and finance alone is unsustainable. The question is whether we will first think about economic growth and then about how to distribute its proceeds, or whether we will try to build an economic and social model that takes securing decent childhoods for all as a fundamental aim.

Notes

- 1 Gordon Brown (2001) cited in HM Treasury, *Press Release, 143/01*, 13th December 2001.
- 2 Nussbaum, M. (2000). *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Decent Childhoods: an overview

	Decent Childhoods		
Vision	Financial Security	Meaningful Opportunities	Feeling Valued
Indicators	60% median income, material deprivation	Attainment at age 18	Social gradient in youth voting turnout
Drivers of Change	Full Employment	Education for life	Sharing Responsibility
Tests for policy, practice and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does it promote a fairer distribution of the rewards from work? ■ Does it ensure that all have opportunities to participate in paid work? ■ Does it ensure a better balance between paid work and family life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does it promote secure foundations? ■ Does it narrow the attainment gap? ■ Does provide second chance balance between paid work and family life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Does the language used by those with power and influence stigmatise those without? ■ Are services respectful of the agency and expertise of the people they are designed to serve? ■ Can this agenda be an inclusive call to action?

Part 1 Introduction

Labour's pledge to end child poverty, now enshrined in the Child Poverty Act, was a bold and important goal. The extent of the ambition allied to the sustained commitment to real progress could have ensured the Labour Government's progressive legacy. Yet, despite some major achievements, the child poverty agenda did not deliver on its promise.

As advocates for this agenda we spent several years seeking to achieve change through Government and wider action. As the 2010 target of halving child poverty approached we became increasingly aware of the narrowness of the debate. The target was dragging the agenda to focus on a simple equation: x billion invested in tax credits would take y children out of poverty. The indicator of success - the poverty line - had become the target, and evolved into the de facto policy goal. But when politicians or campaigners (ourselves included) spoke of children being lifted out of poverty, what did we actually mean? What was the life change we were referring to and attempting to communicate to the wider public?

It is not that money does not matter, it is critical, but the approach felt politically and economically unsustainable, even before the credit crunch and 2010 general election. Something was lacking; yes the standard of living of people on low incomes could be improved, but with a ceiling to the transformative potential. There was a diminishing return on tax credits in terms of the kinds of qualitative changes to life experiences that people aspire to: better homes, better neighbourhoods, better prospects, better jobs, stronger and more secure family lives.

We believe that the approach which dominated Labour's time in Government was brave, sincere, had positive results but was ultimately lacking.

Despite the language of austerity which dominates our current public debate, we remain an extraordinarily rich country. That wealth is shared unevenly. Most of us enjoy a material standard of living incomparable to generations before; but too many – millions of children – are left behind. Perhaps we can find a shared language for our individual and collective aspiration that sets out what we should expect as a decent childhood for those who grow up in 21st Century Britain. This review is an attempt to start thinking about the way we frame our aspirations for decent childhoods for all, and in doing so to set out some of the social and policy levers we may need to pull to get there.

This report is structured as follows:

Part 2 gives an overview of Labour's approach to tackling child poverty and reflects on its successes.

Part 3 focuses on the failure of the child poverty agenda to connect with the public, including those whom it was intended to help, and to challenge a 'them and us' rhetoric that continued to influence attitudes towards poverty and the policy agenda.

Part 4 looks at the outstanding policy challenges, focusing on the wide inequalities that exist in income and wealth, and the drivers of these inequalities in the education system and the labour market.

Part 5 presents an alternative frame focussing on a concept of Decent Childhoods comprising the pillars of financial security, meaningful opportunity and feeling valued.

Part 6 suggests some indicative tests for the direction of policy.

Part 7 concludes by placing this agenda in the current context.

Part 2 Labour's approach and successes

There were over 900,000 fewer children in poverty when Labour left office, reversing both national and international trends.

These successes were the result of policy interventions that both increased family incomes through the tax and benefit system, and increased parental employment. This approach was not just about 'more money'; a wide range of policies were implemented intended to improve children's life chances.

Labour also changed the political climate around poverty, forging a consensus that put child poverty on all parties' agendas, culminating in the approval of the 2010 Child Poverty Act that put the target to end child poverty by 2020 on a statutory footing.

It is easy to forget the situation in the UK in 1999 when Tony Blair made his ground-breaking Toynbee Hall speech setting out the ambition to abolish child poverty by 2020. Child poverty in 1999 was the highest in Europe, with the proportion of children living in poverty rising from 14 to 33 per cent between 1979 and 1999.³ Jane Waldfogel in her thorough review of Labour's approach concludes that since then, *"by any measurement and despite obstacles, Britain has significantly reduced child poverty"*.⁴ The latest official figures, covering Labour's last year in office, show that the legacy of Labour's time in office was 900,000 fewer children in relative poverty, and 2 million fewer living below an absolute poverty line.⁵ Gains were made in three main areas:

- increasing family incomes through the tax and benefit system,
- increasing parental employment, and
- improving children's 'life chances'.

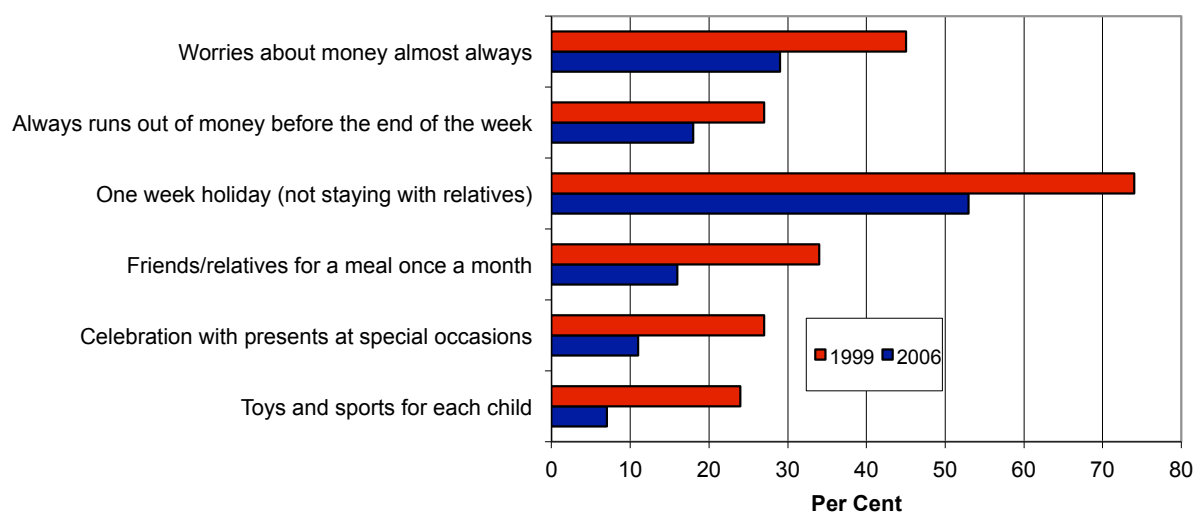
A comprehensive analysis of policy change has been undertaken by Jane Waldfogel, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) and researchers at the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion.⁶ In this Part we highlight the main contours of the Labour approach, and its significant achievements.

Increasing parental incomes through the tax and benefit system

Labour significantly increased financial transfers to families with children, principally through increases in Child Benefit, and the introduction of and then increases in Child Tax Credit. This spending was targeted at families in the lower income deciles, and acted to reduce inequality.⁷ Overall, spending on child contingent tax credits and benefits increased by more than two-thirds in real terms between 1997/8 and 2006/7, and public spending in this area became more concentrated on families in lower income groups (although families in the poorest decile appear to have done less well, in part because much of the increase in spending was directed to low income working families via the Working Tax Credit).⁸ The IFS suggest that these increases in financial support were the critical factor in reducing child poverty during Labour's period in office, and that when Labour ceased to increase spending, in 2004/5, child poverty ceased to fall. Their analysis shows that:

*"changes in the tax and benefit system largely explain the large overall reduction in child poverty since 1998–99; the striking slowdown in progress towards the child poverty targets between 2004–05 and 2007–08; and some of the variation in child poverty trends between different groups of children."*⁹

Figure 1 Material deprivation and financial stress among lone parents, 1999 and 2006
Percentage lack certain items/experiencing certain situations in Family and Children's Study



Source: data from Table 3.2 in Stewart, K (2009)¹⁰

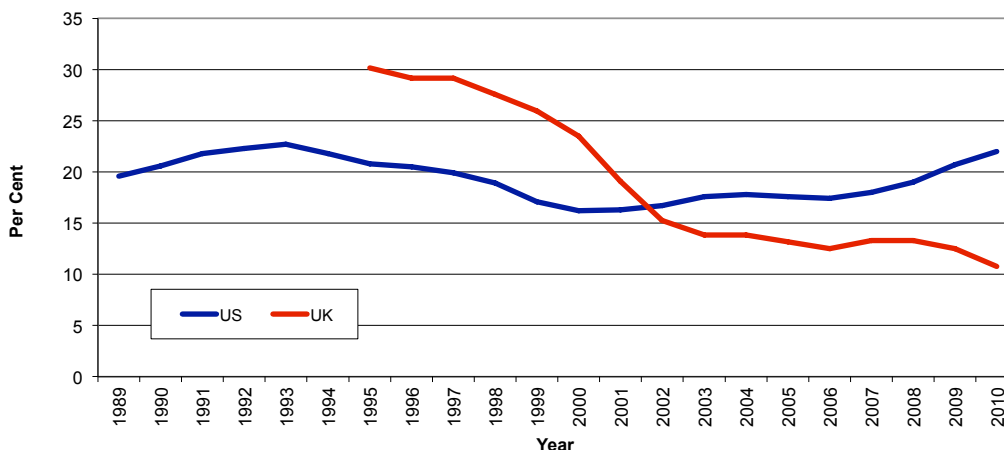
It seems obvious to state that giving families more money makes them less poor, but it is this part of Labour's strategy that has increasingly come under criticism. Nick Clegg has stated scepticism about efforts to increase family incomes; '*poverty plus a pound is not enough...*'¹¹ Although it is hard to disagree with the idea that increasing benefits is insufficient on its own to tackle child poverty (though the characterisation of Labour as reliant only on this approach is misleading) this does not mean that financial transfers are unnecessary: directly increasing family incomes has a significant impact both on poverty and on children's lives. We know that the boost to family incomes during Labour's early years in office led to families spending more money on important things in children's lives, including clothing and footwear, fruit and vegetables, and books.¹² Particularly in the early years of New Labour when the majority of increases took place there were falls in levels of material deprivation as shown in Figure 1. Moreover Paul Gregg's analysis points to improvements in children's outcomes, as a consequence of increases in family incomes.¹³ Money does matter.

Labour has also been accused of moving households closer or just over an arbitrary poverty line, with little real difference to the quality of children's lives. Yet analysis by the IFS has shown that had the poverty line been set at either 50 per cent or 70 per cent of median income (as opposed to the standard measure of 60 per cent), the impact would have been the same. This implies that poverty reduction measures were targeted across low income households without evidence of a "low hanging fruit" strategy to meeting the target. As Figure 2 shows, over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, against a fixed, rather than moving benchmark, poverty rates tumbled in the UK compared to the US, even including the period of the Clinton reforms.

Increasing parental employment

As the slogan 'Work for those who can, security for those who cannot' sought to express, Labour placed a strong emphasis on increasing the proportion of people in paid work, and increasing parental employment was seen as the core of the child poverty strategy. This was primarily targeted at lone parents, with substantial success. The lone parent employment rate increased from 45 to 57 per cent over the period 1997 to 2010. Parental employment rates in couples also increased slightly. The employment rate for mothers in couples increased from 68 to 71 per cent, and that for fathers in couples from 88.7 to 89.4 per cent. In 2008, before the recession, the employment rate for fathers had been 91 per cent.¹⁵

Figure 2 Absolute poverty in the US and UK, 1989-2010
Percentage of children below fixed poverty line



Source: Adapted from Waldfogel and Smeeding (2010)¹⁴; data from Annual poverty reports from the US Census Bureau (2010) and UK Department for Work and Pensions (2010)
 US data - percentage of children below official US poverty line (about 35% median income in 2000)
 UK data - percentage of children below UK absolute poverty line (about 60% median income in 1998/99)

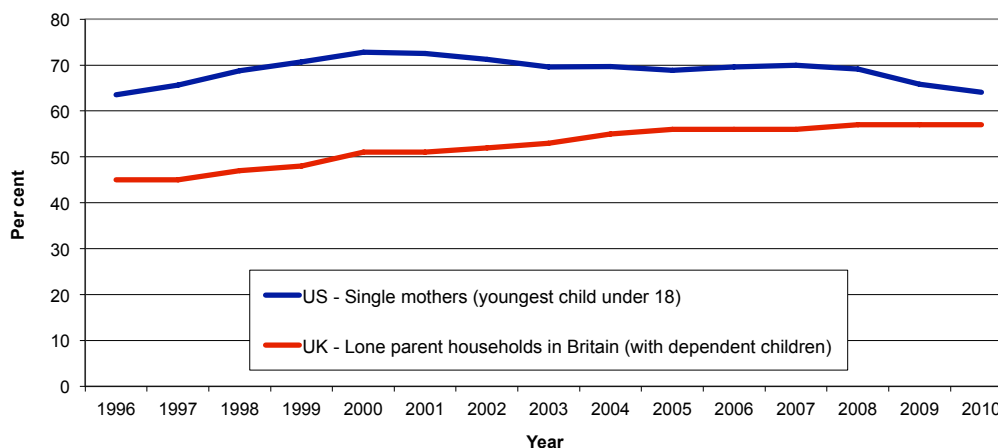
The parental employment strategy consisted of three broad planks:

- Measures to make work pay; the National Minimum Wage and the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit (and the subsequent Working Tax Credit);
- Active Labour Market measures to encourage single parents to take up jobs; the introduction of the voluntary New Deal for Lone Parents followed by increasing conditionality for single parents, with full job search required from those with older children from 2008 onwards; and
- Measures to make work easier to combine with childrearing - a large increase in the quantity and affordability of childcare and an increase in rights for working parents, including the right to request flexible working for those in a job for over 6 months.

The IFS show that these increases in parental employment contributed to falls in child poverty over this period, particularly from 1999 to 2005 (the lone parent employment rate saw its most substantial growth during this period, and has slowed since then).

We point to significant gaps in Labour’s approach to the labour market in Part 4. But ‘welfare reform’ remained a consistent theme throughout Labour’s time in office, and one that, at least in terms of lone parents’ employment, delivered significant results; the rise in the lone parent employment rate over this period equalled that following the US’s much heralded ‘end to welfare as we know it’ in 1996 (albeit from a lower base).

Figure 3 Single parent employment in Britain and US, 1996-2010



Source: UK figures, Labour Force Survey data at www.poverty.org.uk; US figures, Gabe, T (2011) welfare, work and poverty status of female headed households 1987-2009, Congressional Research Service

Improving life chances

Improving life chances is generally taken to mean breaking the link between growing up in poverty, and experiencing poor outcomes related to health and employment in adult life.¹⁶ Labour invested substantially in this agenda, as part of a broad range of strategies to tackle disadvantage, promote social inclusion and the Every Child Matters agenda and improve homes and neighbourhoods. We do not attempt a full account of the myriad of policy initiatives here, but these included:

- the Sure Start Maternity Grant (a payment of £500 to low income mothers on the birth of each new child);
- investment in early years education through the Sure Start programme,¹⁷ later developed into Children's Centres;
- the provision of 15 hours of free early education or childcare for three and four year olds;
- the Educational Maintenance Allowance which encouraged low income children to remain in education post 16;¹⁸ and
- the Child Trust Fund, aiming to give all young people an asset at age 18.¹

Labour also targeted educational inequality, investing significantly in schools, and particularly those in disadvantaged areas through programmes such as Excellence in Cities.¹⁹ In the following section, we outline the continuing extent of educational inequalities, but there is some evidence to show that these interventions had begun to produce positive results;

- The most recent evaluation of Sure Start, found some evidence of a positive influence on children's development, although a small number of negative effects and non-effects were also noted.²⁰
- Overall, the number of children who fail to gain any qualification has declined from 35,000 in 1999 to 7,000 in 2009.²¹
- Disadvantaged schools and areas have seen more rapid improvement in school results than the average.²²
- There is some evidence of a narrowing of attainment gaps between children from different family backgrounds. Gregg and Macmillan conclude that *"for younger generations, the educational differences across family backgrounds at age 16 and in literacy and numeracy test scores at age 10/11 do appear to be equalising, but the picture for education after age 16 is less clear."*²³

Forging a political consensus

In the next Part we suggest that child poverty never really connected as an issue outside of a narrow policy elite. But the success of ensuring consensus around the importance of child poverty within this elite was significant. The great success of Labour's approach was in shifting the political centre of gravity on this issue and the adoption by all major parties of child poverty goals. Where once the Conservative Party denied the existence of relative poverty, today the political debate has shifted to how we address it, with all parties supporting the Child Poverty Act that placed the target to end child poverty by 2020 on a statutory footing.

And yet...

Despite these successes and the significant reductions in the number of children living in poverty, Kitty Stewart's conclusion that *"it is difficult not to look back on a decade of growth and huge parliamentary majorities as a rare opportunity only partly grasped to restructure society in the interests of the poorest children"* rings true.²⁴

Although progress was made, Labour fell far short of the aim to halve child poverty by 2010. Current projections suggest that following policy changes made by the current government, the proportion of children in relative child poverty will rise to 24 per cent by 2020.²⁵

1 The Sure Start Maternity Grant has been limited, and the Child Trust Fund and Educational Maintenance Allowance abolished under the current government.

We believe that the fact that the child poverty agenda was not truly transformative can be (at least in part) attributed to two major failings in the approach taken to tackling poverty in the last decade, not only by the Labour government but by campaigners – ourselves included.

Firstly, despite the political consensus forged around child poverty, the agenda failed to resonate outside a political and policy elite, lacking a language in which to describe either the experiences of those living in poverty or the fact that many face this risk, and falling back on narratives that stigmatised those who are poor. This failure to make a connection with a wider public both shaped the policy responses, and restricted the space for political action. We discuss this further in Part 3.

Secondly, while the large rise in child poverty in the 1980s and the sustained pressures on inequalities stemmed in part from profound changes in economic organisation, the labour market and the family, the policy agenda around child poverty became increasingly narrow. Child poverty remained at the margins of policy making, a separate agenda, unconnected to wider questions about the nature of our economy or society, and in particular the labour market. This failure to integrate the child poverty agenda with wider questions about who the economy benefits, alongside an unwillingness amongst politicians to consider a more interventionist agenda, both in economic terms and with respect to the public debate, meant that poverty policy was always seen as a post hoc solution, after the fundamentals of the labour market and economy had been worked out, rather than something that required some of these fundamentals to be reassessed. These issues are picked up in Part 4.

Notes

- 3 Using a definition of poverty based on falling below 60 percent of equivalised median income after housing costs. Brewer, M. and Gregg, P. (2001) *Eradicating Child Poverty in Britain: Welfare Reform and Children since 1997* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies
- 4 Waldfogel, J (2010) *Britain's War on Poverty* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- 5 DWP (2011) *Households Below Average Income 1994/95 -2009/10* published online at <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/hbai/hbai2010/index.php?page=contents>
- 6 Brewer, M., Browne, J., Joyce, R. and Sibieta, L. (2010) *Child poverty in the UK since 1998-99: lessons from the last decade* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies. Hills, J, Sefton, T. and Stewart, K. (eds.) (2009) *Towards a more equal society?: poverty, inequality and policy since 1997*. Bristol: Polity Press. Waldfogel, J (2010) *Britain's War on Poverty* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- 7 Adam, S. and Browne, J. (2010) *Redistribution, work incentives, and thirty years of UK tax and benefit reform* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- 8 Sefton, T (2009) *A child's portion: an analysis of public expenditure on children in the UK* London: Save the Children.
- 9 Brewer, M., Browne, J., Joyce, R. and Sibieta, L. (2010) *Child poverty in the UK since 1998-99: lessons from the last decade* London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.
- 10 Stewart, K. (2009) 'A scar on the soul of Britain? Child poverty and disadvantage under New Labour' in Hills, J, Sefton, T and Stewart, K (eds.) (2009) *Towards a more equal society?: poverty, inequality and policy since 1997*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- 11 Clegg, N. (2010) 'Poverty plus a pound isn't enough' *The Guardian*, 9th November 2010.
- 12 Gregg, P., Waldfogel, J. and Washbrook, E. (2006) 'Family expenditures post-welfare reform in the UK: Are low-income families starting to catch up?', *Labour Economics*, 13 (6), (pp. 721-746).
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Part 3 The failure to connect

Despite the political consensus forged around child poverty, the agenda failed to resonate outside a political and policy elite.

This lack of connection can be attributed to three linked factors. Firstly, although poverty and a lack of material resources is the factor that links many experiences of disadvantage, for many people the term itself does not convey these experiences well, or provide a vision of what a society free of poverty might look like.

Secondly, the poverty debate did not fully reflect the fact that poverty is dynamic; a common experience rather than one confined to a small group of people. The static view of poverty creates an impression of 'the poor' and 'the rest', restricting the ability to build support for what is seen as a minority concern. Poverty as a concept, though analytically powerful, is stigmatising and few are willing to identify with this label.

Thirdly there has been insufficient respect for those in poverty, seen both in terms of the willingness of politicians to play on inaccurate stereotypes, and in the failure of services to give sufficient weight to the agency and expertise of those using them. One indicator of the alienation this produced is the widening gap in political participation.

Forging a public consensus?

Ending child poverty never really took on political salience outside a narrow policy elite. Debate within this elite shifted significantly to recognise the importance of child poverty, but this shift in the political support created a dissonance around the agenda. While it became unthinkable for mainstream politicians not to engage with child poverty, it appeared to go unnoticed by the wider population. Gaining widespread public support for the campaign to tackle child poverty has been a struggle. Among both politicians and campaigners there has long been a sense of this mission failing to generate significant waves. People care about this; attitude surveys show a decent level of support for the issues in principle. Yet the way that child poverty is framed by policymakers has not translated into support for political action.

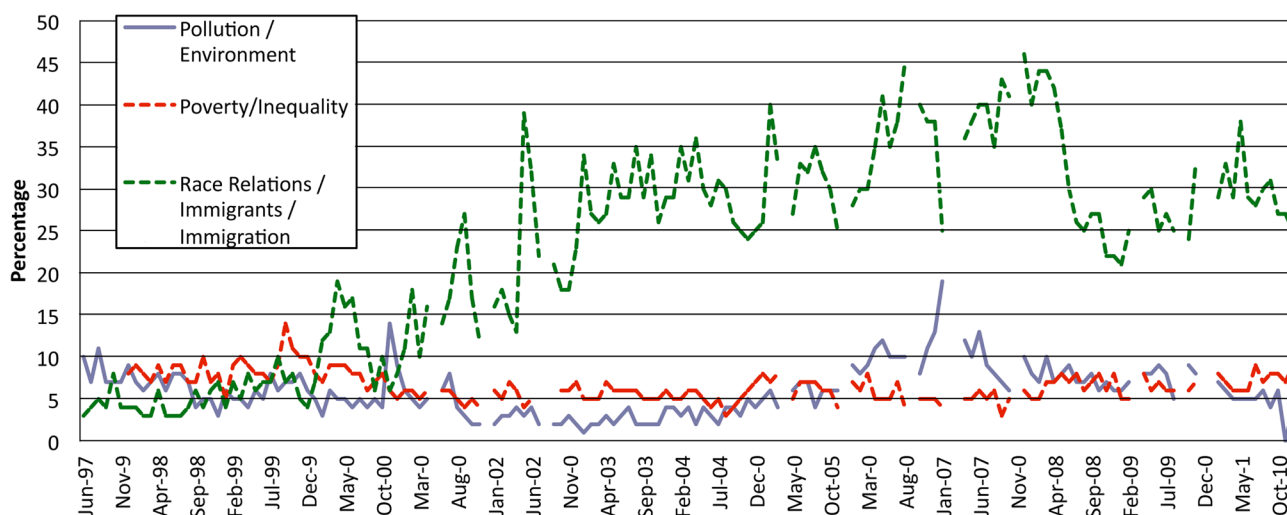
This was not a problem that was overlooked. By the middle of Labour's period of Government, it had become clear to those concerned with child poverty that greater public concern on the issue was necessary to drive forward the policy agenda, and to win the argument for greater prioritisation and resources. Politicians would tell activists that they never received a letter about child poverty, compared to the hundreds received on others issues, including global poverty (though doubtless the experience of poverty led many to their constituency surgeries), and impress on them the need to "create political space" that they could run into. Campaigning organisations also knew as well that this was not an easy issue with which to create a clamour for change. Building on the earlier work by John Hills,²⁶ a range of studies began to look public attitudes to poverty and communication strategies around the issue. The Fabian Society explored public attitudes as part of its Commission on Poverty and Life Chances.²⁹ The Joseph Rowntree Foundation carried out work with MORI initially and subsequently launched a widespread programme of research looking at public attitudes and communication strategies.²⁸ The DWP themselves conducted research to inform the Government's approach.²⁹ Other NGOs that formed part of the End Child Poverty coalition engaged in similar work, some with the support of specialist consultancies, to communicate better these issues to the public. The TUC and Unemployed Workers Centre anti-poverty conference focussed on how child poverty could be better communicated.

A range of potential strategies were proposed. These included the need to highlight solutions to poverty and inequality to demonstrate that change is possible and shift attitudes that current poverty and inequality levels in the UK are inevitable; the greater use of real-life stories and the voice of people with experience of poverty; discussion about greater use of a human rights framework; a focus on the economic and social costs of poverty or on poverty more broadly rather the euphemistic child poverty as if their parents are doing just fine.

But despite the thought put into this issue, the child poverty debate in the UK never really captured the public imagination in stark contrast to the success (in terms of recognition) of the Make Poverty History campaign targeting international poverty. The Mori "Issues Index", tracking the issues which people in Britain say are the most important facing the country is indicative. Figure 4 below shows the proportion

citing poverty and inequality, compared to two other issues; the environment and race relations / immigration. These two comparators give a good sense of the place of poverty/inequality within the public's overall set of concerns. Poverty/inequality is a concern, but at a low level and remains broadly stable, impervious to policy announcements, campaigning activities, and even to the recent recession. There is no evidence of the Child Poverty campaign making a mark. Moreover these figures include inequality, and therefore people's concern with the issues such as banker's pay, as well as poverty. Concern about the environment, another issue where activists have long struggled to engage the public, follows a similar trend. Over the same period, race relations and immigration went from a similar position in the public's mind to becoming a "doorstep" political issue.

Figure 4 Importance of poverty to the British public, 1997-2009
 Percentage citing "Poverty and Inequality", "Pollution / Environment" and "Race Relations / Immigrants / Immigration" as most important issues facing Britain today, month by month



Source: Mori Issue Index (missing data for some months)
www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemID=56&view=wide

We think that this lack of connection can be attributed to three linked factors. Firstly, the term poverty can be unhelpful. Poverty retains great force as an analytical concept, and as a distinct type of disadvantage characterised by low income and a lack of material resources. But the ideas that motivate people to care about these issues are not only about a lack of income, but other aspects of fairness and justice. While we believe that the standard indicator of poverty of '60 per cent of median equivalised income' (either before or after housing costs) is a good measurement tool, it conveys little about what living in poverty actually means. Nor does it give any positive idea of what a society free of poverty might look like. We discuss this further in Part 4.

Secondly, the poverty debate did not fully reflect the fact that poverty is dynamic – something experienced by many. The static view of poverty creates an impression of 'the poor' and 'the rest', restricting the ability to build support for what is seen as a minority concern.

Thirdly, there has been insufficient respect for those in poverty, seen both in terms of the willingness of politicians to play on inaccurate stereotypes, and in the failure of services to give sufficient weight to the agency and expertise of those using them.

'The poor' and 'the rest'

Countless research shows that poverty is dynamic; recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation research shows that while chronic poverty only affects 10% of the poor population, and 3% of the population as a whole, poverty at some point affected 30% of the population.³⁰ Yet too often poverty has been seen as the condition of 'the bottom', and linked with a misleading debate about an 'underclass'.

Since Charles Murray reopened the underclass discourse in the 1980s, discussion of those at the bottom has taken on many guises: the hard to reach, socially excluded, high cost-high harm, multiply disadvantaged, breakdown Britain, welfare dependent. Those who use these terms often have very different meanings

and cover the political spectrum. Sometimes, as in frequent discussion of social exclusion in the early years of New Labour, the meanings are broad and cover much of the population that are disadvantaged in some way. More often though they conjure images of dysfunction; families affected by drug and alcohol abuse, endemic reliance on out-of-work benefits and other forms of social malaise. These were the focus of much discussion in the influential Breakdown Britain report³¹ produced by the Centre for Social Justice, and were drawn on by many in the aftermath of the 2011 riots.

That there are some families in Britain for who these images of dysfunction describe some aspect of their lives is of little doubt. However the real empirical definitions are often weak and the numbers are hard to quantify. In any realistic assessment however they represent only a tiny proportion of those who experience significant childhood disadvantage in the UK. A recent report by the National Centre for Social Research classified just 5 per cent of families as ‘severely excluded’, and experiencing multiple disadvantages including physical and mental health problems³² compared to the 20 per cent (before housing costs) or 29 per cent (after housing costs) of children who live in relative poverty. Many of the issues commonly used as explanatory factors for the poverty of individual households cannot account for the overall incidence of poverty in the UK. For example, while families with drug or alcohol dependency problems are more likely to be poor, one estimate suggests that just 2.7 per cent of couples with children include an alcohol dependent parent, and just 0.9 per cent include a drug dependent parent.³³

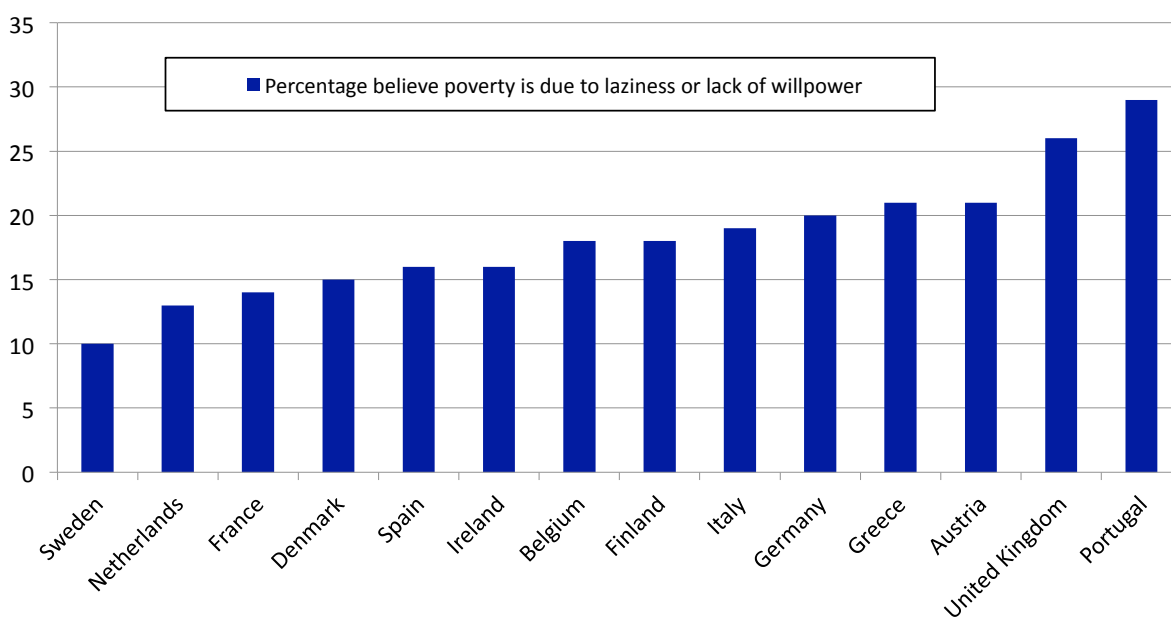
Despite being inaccurate, the underclass discourse hinders attempts to tackle poverty, painting it as a condition experienced by a cut off group of people – ‘them’ rather than ‘us’. Research shows that most people, whatever their income, see themselves as falling somewhere within the middle of the income distribution and are unlikely to identify as poor, particularly given the level of associated stigma.³⁴

Stigma and disrespect

Drawing on the images of the ‘underclass’ there is a persistent culture which demeans those claiming benefits and living in social housing, and makes it unlikely that those who experience poverty are likely to want to self-identify as ‘poor’. This widespread popular discourse has been explored recently in Owen Jones’ *Chavs*,³⁵ which talks about the change from working class “as salt of the earth to scum of the earth” and “a class to be escaped from rather than to proud of”. A change in language over the last generation can also be detected in a hardening of attitudes towards the poor.³⁶

As Figure 5 shows people in the UK, alongside those in Portugal, are much likely to explain poverty by laziness or lack of will power than in other European countries.³⁷

Figure 5 Attitudes towards poverty across Europe, 2007
Percentage believing poverty is due to laziness or lack of willpower



Source: Eurobarometer 67.1

These values and beliefs are influenced by the political discourse. Politicians are too often at the forefront these attacks. Their failure to challenge inaccurate depictions of people claiming benefits as scroungers both reinforce social values that stigmatize the poor, and made it harder to take political action to tackle this poverty. This role in influencing public opinion on these issues can be detected in the changing rhetoric of successive Labour Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions throughout their period in office. In 2002, Andrew Smith was talking about the barriers to work faced by those on Incapacity Benefit, and the fact that many wanted to be in employment:

*".. more than three quarters of a million people on incapacity benefits tell us they want a job. Just because people are on IB it doesn't follow that they can't work. For people off work - through illness or disability - it is often a lack of confidence or knowledge about the support and advice available which stops them getting back to work..."*³⁸

By 2005, when David Blunkett was Secretary of State, the rhetoric had started to shift to one of challenging 'dependency', and a 'something for something agenda'³⁹ and by 2006, John Hutton was using the language of 'benefit dependency' and 'rights and responsibilities':

*"The clear link between benefit dependency and poverty is shown by the simple fact that half of the most severe pockets of deprivation in the country are contained within the hundred parliamentary constituencies with the highest numbers of incapacity benefit claimants. So by creating a welfare state where rights properly match responsibilities we have the potential to end the ignominy of a system that can trap people in benefit dependency rather than helping them into work."*⁴⁰

When James Purnell spoke at the Second Reading of the Welfare Reform Bill in 2009, the implication that the welfare system was allowing people to claim benefits as 'a way of life' was clear:

*"We are also toughening our regime to deter more people from committing benefit fraud. In future those who abuse the system will lose their right to support from that system following their first offence. Being on benefits should not be a way of life. This is why we are taking the powers to require full time activity for those claiming JSA for over 2 years. This will help teach basic work skills, give people the work habit and deter those who are playing the system."*⁴¹

Much as with the underclass debate, this rhetoric around 'welfare dependency' is based on an at best highly partial, and at worst a highly distorted picture. For example:

- There is little evidence that people on benefits do not want to find work. DWP Research amongst repeat Jobseeker's Allowance claimants in 2006 found a lack of evidence that people cycling in and out of work was due to choice. Rather the findings consistently indicate an inability to find sustained employment.⁴²
- More recent 'customer insight' research conducted by the DWP 'segmented' benefit claimants into seven groups, based on their attitudes towards employment. Based on qualitative interviews, focus groups, and a survey of over 2000 claimants, they found that just 11 per cent could be said to see a life on benefits as somehow 'better' than work'.⁴³
- The numbers of claimants on 'inactive' benefits have reduced significantly during Labour's period in office. Increases in the lone parent employment rate have been described above, and the majority of long term claimants of Incapacity Benefit are now those who have a serious health condition, indicated by receipt of Disability Living Allowance.⁴⁴
- The oft cited 'intergenerationally workless' household also appears extremely rare. No clear figures yet exist for this phenomena, but households in which both parents and children have never worked account for less than one per cent of all households.⁴⁵
- High profile benefit fraud campaigns ignore the fact that fraud has fallen over the past decade. Analysis shows that, when looking at DWP benefits, the amount of cash lost to fraud halved over the past decade, falling from £2.2bn in 2000-01 to £1bn in 2009-10.⁴⁶

The lived experience of poverty and the policy response

This negative discourse shapes the lives of those living with a low income. Even in contexts of absolute poverty, the experience is about social standing, dignity and stigma; concepts that Richard Sennett encompasses within the term respect.⁴⁷

Whilst there has been a running debate about the way our society thinks about children (see for example

the Good Childhood Inquiry, Toxic Childhood)⁴⁸ for some children this interplays with a pervasive negativity about people on low incomes. Research with children in poverty consistently brings out this aspect of their experience; the sense that they are not valued by their peers, or by the wider society in which they live. A review of research for the DWP in 2009 found children highlighting ‘*visible signs of poverty and difference*’ as a key area of concern:

“a lack of the same material goods and clothes as their peers, and an inability to take part in the same social and leisure activities meant that children experienced bullying and were fearful of stigma and social isolation ... the deep emotional trauma that can accompany experiences of stigma and social difference”.

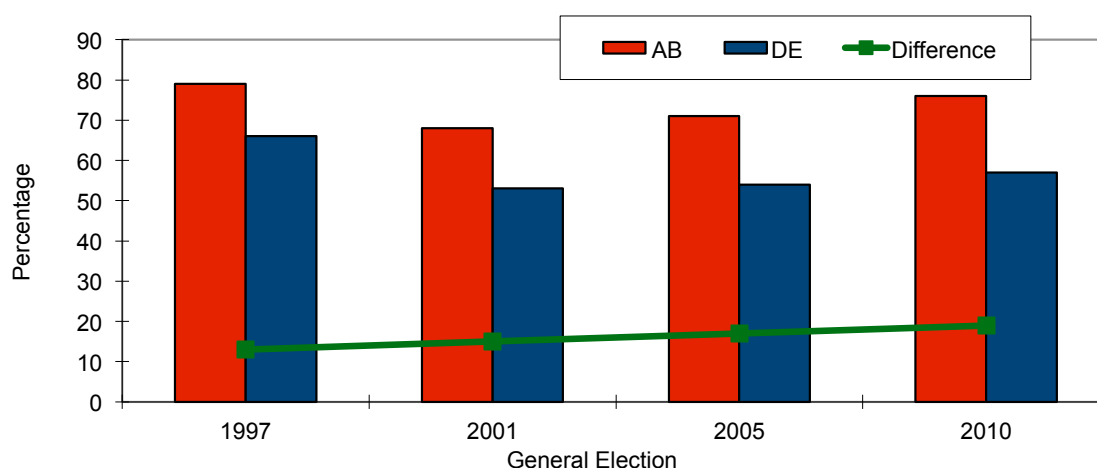
Recent research by the Children’s Commissioner with children and young people aged between 10 and 20 likewise highlighted how poverty often leads to children suffering socially:

“Young people make strong links between being poor and being bullied. Intimidation and torment are often associated with the way someone looks (particularly their manner of dress). Although young people...did not report cases of physical violence, they told us about the experience of social aggression (including isolation from friendship groups and cruel gossiping) and how it affected their own well-being and that of their peers.”⁴⁹

A lack of empathy with the experience of people living in poverty shaped the way in which policies were designed and delivered. The rhetoric around ‘benefit dependency’ was accompanied by an increasing focus on conditionality – with new work search requirements imposed on lone parents and claimants of Incapacity Benefit, an agenda set to be taken further by the current Government, which wants to exclude those who fail to meet benefit conditions from receipt of benefit for up to three years.⁵⁰

Some attention was paid to the impact of service design on the experience and perceptions of claimants, perhaps most notably in the design of the tax credit system. This explicitly aimed to remove the stigma of claiming benefits, with the idea that everyone should fill in a tax return. The ‘progressive universalism’ that underpinned it sought to break down differences between ‘the poor’ and ‘the rest’. However, intention was not followed through with delivery. A failure to fully attend to the way in which people on low income manage their finance, often budgeting weekly rather than monthly, meant that a system designed to simplify financial support resulted in adding greatly to the complexity of many people’s lives.⁵¹ Built in overpayments within the system compounded with IT failures undermined the idea that this would be a ‘benefit’ that was delivered with respect.⁵²

Figure 6 Estimated voting turnout at UK general elections by social class, 1997-2010



Source: Ipsos Mori, ‘How Britain Voted’ series, <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oltemId=2613>

How do we know that these things affect people? Alienation can materialise in many ways. One particularly pernicious aspect of contemporary social alienation is the political disengagement of people living in poverty. The Hansard Society’s annual audit of political engagement highlights very wide social class differences on every aspect of political engagement. The widening disparity in voting turnout between social classes is suggestive of an increasing sense amongst the poorest that society is not about their interests. This deficit has grown – substantially at every election at least since 1997. In 1997, 79% of social class AB voted as opposed to 66% in DE; a gap of 13%. As Figure 6 shows, while overall turnout

levels fluctuated this gap grew at each successive election and was 19% at the 2010 election. An Electoral Commission report in 2005, *Social Exclusion and Political Engagement* cited a wide range of evidence showing both electoral and wider political disengagement associated with poverty and deprivation.⁵³

Conclusion

The need to consider how services can be stigmatising was captured by the evaluation of the child poverty pilots within Local Authorities, put in place in 2008:

“Each of the ten pilots thought carefully about how they could promote their service(s) and were conscious that provision labelled for ‘families in poverty’ or to reduce ‘child poverty’ would be stigmatising and therefore would hinder recruitment and engagement. A range of names and brands were created to present a broader message about the support available for parents or families, both for the overall service put in place but also for the staff or roles created.”⁵⁴

The conclusion that ‘services labelled for families in poverty or to reduce child poverty would be stigmatising and hinder recruitment and engagement’ is one that could be applied to the broader child poverty campaign.

Notes

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Part 4 Policy challenges

Wide inequalities exist within the UK, in incomes, wealth and opportunity. Two major drivers of these are disparities in educational attainment and the differential rewards from the labour market. These hold back progress in tackling child poverty.

While some progress was made in the last ten years to redress disadvantage in these areas, this fell far short of what was needed; in part due to the lack of a positive vision of a society free of child poverty and the ensuing narrowness of the policy debate; in part due to a dominant climate of opinion that saw interfering in markets as undesirable, and action on inequality as politically toxic.

The rise in Inequalities

Inequalities in incomes, wealth and opportunities have been increasing within many Western countries since the late 1970s. In their analysis of the causes of this change, the OECD suggests three key explanatory factors:

- *“Globalisation, skill-biased technological progress and institutional and regulatory reforms have all had an impact on the distribution of earnings;*
- *Changes in family formation and household structures have had an impact on household earnings and income inequality;*
- *Tax and benefit systems have changed in the ways they redistribute household incomes.*”⁵⁵

There are good arguments for caring about inequality per se. To cite the National Equality Panel, *“Wide inequalities erode the bonds of common citizenship and recognition of human dignity across economic divides.*”⁵⁶ But inequalities in income and wealth matter particularly for any attempt to tackle child poverty because they affect so fundamentally the prospects of achieving a fair distribution of other goods and opportunities.² UNICEF’s most recent report on inequalities for children across the OECD countries concludes that:

*“Socio-economic status is therefore the indispensable framework for policy analysis of bottom end inequality for children.... Policies designed to address specific inequalities in health or education are therefore likely to have limited impact if they confine themselves to the health and education alone. The most potent fact about children who fall significantly behind their peers is that, by and large, they are the children of families at the bottom end of the socio-economic scale.”*⁵⁷

Other evidence shows that the impact of inequalities goes beyond educational and income prospects, into health and well-being. An extensive recent review of research in this area for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found a strong relationship between income inequality on the one hand and teenage births, imprisonment, low trust, mental illness and obesity on the other, and some evidence that income inequality had an independent, or causal, effect on health and social problems.⁵⁸

There is substantial evidence moreover that social mobility, the current government’s preferred measure of ‘fairness’ is also more possible in countries that have a more equal income distribution. As the Government’s own social mobility strategy concludes, *“studies comparing levels of social mobility in different countries have found a correlation between high levels of income inequality and low levels of social mobility”*.³

Below, we examine the trends in income inequality and wealth inequality. The extent to which the Labour government was prepared to try to reverse or contain these has been subject to some debate. Labour’s tax and benefit policies did contain the growth in income inequality during their early years in office, but were insufficient to reverse the huge rises in income inequality seen in the 1980s, or to tackle the inequalities in wealth.

2 It can also be argued that they matter intrinsically as well as instrumentally, but we leave this question to one side.

3 Albeit that they add that *“some have criticised the validity of this finding... and that the challenge in terms of social mobility is to understand the key components of a more mobile society which do not appear to be related to simple measures of income equality.”* (HM Government (2011) *Opening Doors, Breaking Barriers: A Strategy for Social Mobility* London: The Stationary Office)

As the National Equality Panel (NEP) concluded, *'Britain is an unequal country, more so than many other industrialised countries and more so than it was a generation ago'*. Income inequality is high, with the ratio between the income of the top 10 per cent and that of the bottom 10 per cent being more than 4:1.

However, the IFS have shown that levels of inequality growth (or reductions) were not even over Labour's period in office: income growth was 'mostly inequality reducing' during the first term, except for at the very top and bottom of the income distribution; it was 'unambiguously inequality reducing' during the second term, when the largest income growth was at the bottom, partly as a result of increases in government financial support; and then during their final term in office it was inequality increasing.

Wealth inequality is at shocking levels with an astronomic ratio between the top and bottom 10 per cent of almost 100. The NEP find that other measures of income inequality such as the Gini coefficient are also much higher for wealth than for income, with a value of 61 per cent for total net wealth, compared to 31 per cent for equivalent net income.⁵⁹

Trends in wealth are harder to track over time, due to changes in survey data, but the NEP suggest that on one measure:

*"Until the mid-1980s, there was an uneven trend towards less inequality of wealth, but after the early 1990s it tended to become more unequal again, although fluctuating with stock market cycles. By 2003, after a fall in the stock market, the shares of the wealthiest groups and the overall level of the Gini coefficient had fallen back in that year, but were still as high, or higher, than they had been in 1976."*⁶⁰

Wealth inequalities both reflect and feed through into wider disparities, notably in home ownership. 68 per cent of households owned their property (or were buying it with a mortgage) in 2006/08, and property wealth is slightly less unevenly distributed than financial or private pension wealth.⁶¹ But property ownership represents a key way in which advantage is passed on from parents to children. Data from 2004/5 show that over half of owner occupiers, and 70 per cent of those in social class A (senior professionals) had received an inheritance, compared with under a third of social and private tenants, and under a half of those in social class D (skilled manual workers).⁶²

Research by Shelter in 2004 looked at the distribution of 'housing wealth' amongst children, examining trends over time. They found that *"In the best off tenth of areas the housing wealth per child has increased by 20 times more than that of the lowest decile since 1993"* and conclude that *"the children of Great Britain are clearly becoming quickly more differentiated through the relative wealth of their families."*⁶³ Whereas the top three income deciles of children had access to 51 per cent of the total housing wealth in Britain, the bottom three had access to just 14 per cent.⁶⁴

Access to housing is obviously significant in its own right. But when children (and adults) have access to financial assets this in itself helps to promote better long term planning, with positive effects in other areas of their lives, including employment prospects.⁶⁵

Drivers of inequality – the labour market and education

The OECD argues that reforming tax and benefit policies *"is the most direct and powerful instrument to increase redistributive effects."*⁶⁶ Labour took large steps in the area of financial support policies, significantly increasing the share of resources going to the poorest children, particularly through the tax credit system. But while income transfers might be the most direct instrument to address inequality, the level of inequality produced by the market fundamentally affects how much redistribution is affordable. Labour was reluctant to go down either the route of raising taxation to fund such redistribution, or, with the notable exception of the National Minimum Wage, in intervening in the labour market to influence the amount of redistribution necessary.

Here we discuss two major drivers of inequality, the education system and the labour market. The education system alone cannot lead to greater equality in adult outcomes. Children who exit school into an unequal labour market will see their lives as adults diverge substantially, even when starting from the same place. But at present, poorer children are held back before reaching the starting line, with the education system consistently serving them less well. The focus on the labour market follows naturally. Inequalities in both the rewards from, and the availability of meaningful work, fundamentally shape the lives of parents and their children.

Educational inequalities

Despite the progress in tackling educational inequalities highlighted earlier, the latest data shows that these remain high:

- 25% of children from poor backgrounds fail to meet the expected attainment level at the end of primary school, compared to 3% from affluent backgrounds. Educational inequalities widen as children progress throughout school.⁶⁷
- Only one in five young people from the poorest families achieve five good GCSEs, including English and maths, compared with three-quarters from the richest families. As Figure 7 below show, while the attainment gap for any 5 GCSEs A*-C narrowed substantially, among those with 5A*-C including English and maths there was no change.⁶⁸

As discussed above, targeting these inequalities was a focus of Labour’s approach to education. Lupton, Heath and Salter’s 2009 assessment concluded that *‘there is no doubt that more money has been directed towards schools with disadvantaged intakes and that recent policies are accentuating this redistribution’* and that Labour’s approach to tackling educational inequalities was *‘expensive, extensive and sustained.’* However they raise concerns about the possible impact on educational inequalities of the increased focus on school choice and diversity policies seen in the later years of the Labour government, and note that

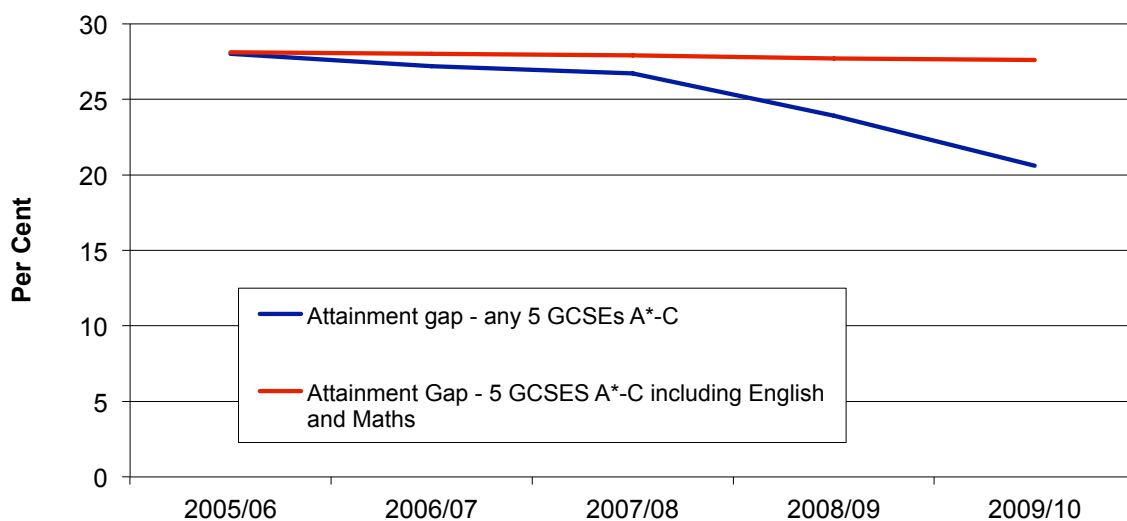
“there is no incentive in the system for schools to spend their additional money on disadvantaged pupils: performance targets have focused on higher grade GCSE attainment, not the progress or achievement of the least advantaged.”⁶⁹

This appears to also be a problem with the Coalition Government’s ‘pupil premium’ which will channel funding to schools with a higher proportion of disadvantaged students, but appears to have no mechanism to ensure that the funding reaches these students themselves.

Labour also failed to resolve the longstanding divide between academic and vocational education post 16. The recent Wolf report into vocational education showed the extent to which prospects for children diverge at this point. While around a third of young people take ‘academic’ A levels post 16:

“among 16 and 17 year olds about a third are in, or moving in and out of, ‘vocational’ provision which offers no clear progression opportunities. Meanwhile apprenticeship programmes, which become ever more important as our youth labour market implodes, remain too rare, and an increasing proportion are offered to older people, not to teenagers...I estimate that at least 350,000 young people in a given 16-19 cohort are poorly served by current arrangements. Their programmes and experiences fail to promote progression into either stable, paid employment or higher level education and training in a consistent or an effective way.”⁷⁰

Figure 7 Trends in the “poverty gap” in school attainment, 2005/6-2009/10
Percentage of children not receiving free school meals attaining 5 GCSEs A*C minus percentage receiving free school meals attaining 5 GCSEs A*C minus



Source: DoE (2010) GCSE and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics in England, 2009/10, Table 2a

The wide educational inequalities that remain in Britain reflect inequalities in income and wealth. But they also act as a key transmission mechanism for these inequalities into future life. As has been much discussed, Britain's rates of social mobility remain low by international standards:

- Just one in nine of those with parents from low income backgrounds reach the top income quartile, whereas almost half of those with parents in the top income quartile stay there.
- The influence of parent's income on the income of children in Britain is among the strongest in the OECD; over one and a half times the impact on male incomes in compared with Canada, Germany and Sweden.⁷¹

The nature of the labour market

Labour market inequalities both reflect inequalities in educational outcomes, and transmit these into inequalities in income and wealth. As Unicef conclude:

*'The only sustainable way to reduce inequality is to stop the underlying widening of wages and income from capital. In particular we have to make sure that people are capable of being in employment and earning wages that keep them and their families from poverty.'*⁷²

Over the course of the past decade, the central narrative of poverty reduction of "work as the best way out of poverty" became increasingly narrowly targeted in policy terms. At the same time the true extent of structural labour market disadvantage has become clearer. Whilst early on in Labour's time in office, serious investment went into tackling barriers to employment through the minimum wage, tax credits, and childcare alongside active labour market programmes (the New Deals) increasingly the focus became on what could be achieved through increased conditionality and support for job readiness and search alone. The current government has similarly concentrated on the motivations of the unemployed to find work, restructuring the use of private sector welfare to work providers within Labour's 'Flexible New Deal' into a 'Work Programme', and continuing the integration of in work and out of work financial support begun with Tax Credits into the Universal Credit.

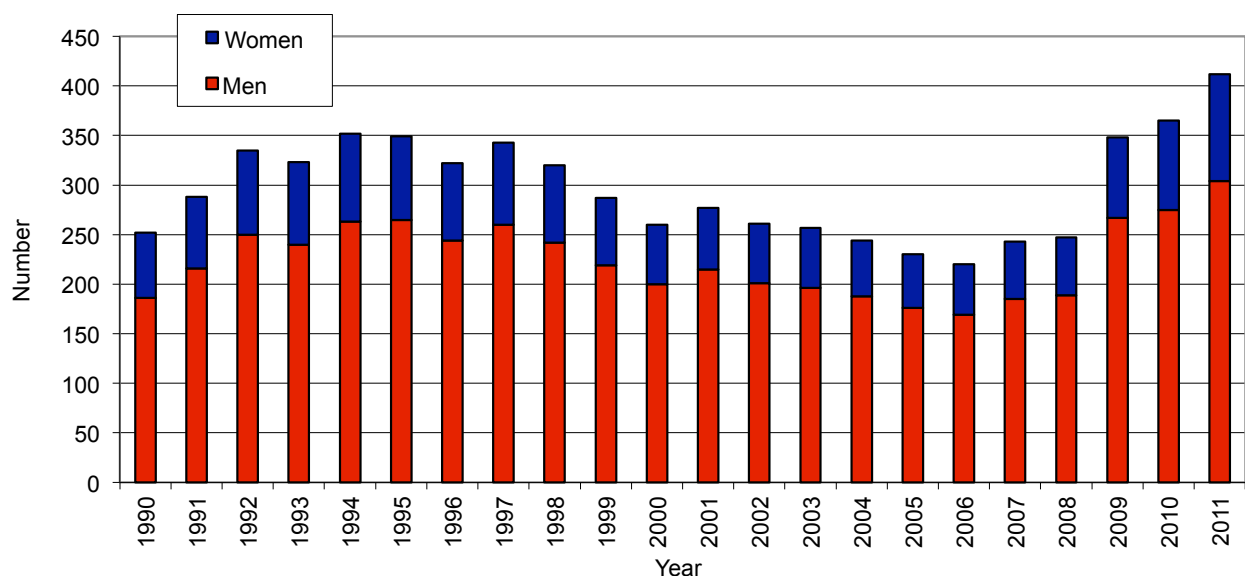
These reforms do little to address the range of systemic vulnerabilities that exist in the labour market. Some of the most significant relate to lack of skills, being in a low employment region, disability and lone parenthood. Many of these are experienced multiply in poor families; none can be adequately addressed with a strategy reliant on welfare to work rules and programmes alone. Such policies do little to address barriers to work and they do nothing to address in work inequalities; low pay, job insecurity, poor conditions and prospects for progression. Here we outline significant aspects of labour market inequality that help contribute to Britain's high child poverty rates.

- **The UK has a high proportion of children in workless households**, higher than any other country in Europe, double the percentage of France and Germany and 5 times the percentage of Denmark. Most are in lone parent households, where despite the increase in employment rate there still exist many barriers. This is highlighted by the much higher rate of children in workless households in London where combining childcare responsibilities with affordable work is hardest. This population is not a static one; every three months approximately 1/6 of the stock of workless households change. Similarly as youngest children grow older, lone parents go back to work, (only with dips around transitions in their children's lives).⁷³
- **Half of children in poverty are in working households**, the vast majority in homes with two parents.⁷⁴ This was not discussed for the first half of Labour's time in office but became increasingly evident. While tax credits significantly boost incomes, the rate of withdrawal means that many families face a very high marginal tax rate once in work. Universal credit aims to address the problem of high marginal tax rates, but current proposals around childcare look set to strengthen incentives to work some hours, but to weaken those to work more.⁷⁵
- **One way of tackling in work poverty is through subsidies.** Without the 'heavy lifting' of tax credits to boost family incomes, rates of child poverty both in and out of work would be far higher. The alternative or complementary strategy of increasing parental working hours in order to address in work poverty has impacts in terms of "time poverty";⁷⁶ the cost to parenting and child well-being that comes from working sufficient hours to make ends meet. Research on the impact of US welfare reform has shown how this lost time can mean that the gains to children's development from parents going to work can be lost, or reversed by the loss in their ability to parent.⁷⁷

- There are **major geographical disparities in economic opportunities**. In some cities in the UK, such as Hull, Blackpool and Grimsby, 1 in 3 workers earns less than £7 an hour.⁷⁸ In London there are extremely high numbers of children in workless households as the costs of housing, childcare and transport and absence of part time work make low skilled employment unobtainable.⁷⁹ Where there are labour shortages, there is great concern that these regions will suffer most. In the first half of the recession it was manufacturing that was most heavily hit. Many jobs have gone that are unlikely to return and from those areas still reliant on major manufacturing employers. With Central and local Government cuts, these regions so reliant on public sector employment will experience a second blow.⁸⁰
- **Those at the bottom of the labour market have seen poor rewards from economic growth**. The story of inequality during the last decade is more complex than that of a simple continuous increase, particularly when looking at earnings. Earnings growth at the very top was rapid throughout the period, but, apart from this, growth appears to have been relatively even across the earnings distribution - without significantly higher growth at levels that are quite near the top (as opposed to at the very top) than at the bottom.⁸¹ In the early period of the Labour government, the introduction of the minimum wage acted to strongly increase earnings growth in the bottom income groups, and there is some evidence that earnings inequality overall reduced in the last decade (at least between the bottom and middle of the earnings distribution).⁸² Yet while pay inequality (excluding the top of the distribution) has not grown over the last decade, this is from a highly unequal base that has seen huge wage inequality over the past thirty years.⁸³ Research by the Resolution Foundation has shown that while in 1977 £16 in every £100 generated by the UK economy went to the bottom half of workers, this has fallen to £10-£12. The vast majority of this they demonstrate is the result of wage inequalities.⁸⁴
- Many low paid workers experience a **'low pay no pay cycle'**. Half of all men making a new claim of jobseekers allowance, and a third of all women, had made a previous claim within 6 months.⁸⁵ The numbers of these have risen dramatically in the past three years.

Figure 8 Cycling in and out of work, 1990-2011

Number of men and women making a new claim for Jobseeker's Allowance who were last claiming this benefit less than six months previously



Source: Figure 2 in Chris Goulden (2010) *Cycles of poverty, unemployment, and low pay* Joseph Rowntree Foundation. <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/cycles-unemployment-low-pay>

- There is **little progression in the UK labour market for the low paid**. 60% of those in the bottom decile in earnings in 2001/2 remained in the bottom 30% by the end of the decade.⁸⁶ The DWP piloted a major programme to improve 'employment retention and advancement' for low paid workers, but the evaluation suggests that while this had some success in increasing the earnings of low paid men, for lone parents earnings gains wore off with time.⁸⁷
- **Gender, disability and ethnicity continue to influence earnings levels**: research published in 2008 by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found pay penalties associated with being a woman, of Black, Asian or Chinese descent, or being disabled.⁸⁸ The gender pay gap in the UK stands at 15.5 per cent, one of the highest levels in the European Union.⁸⁹

- **The current rise in unemployment has had a disproportionate impact on young people:** the latest figures show a youth unemployment rate of 20 per cent, compared to an overall rate of 8 per cent,⁹⁰ and Gregg and Wadsworth show that “in the 2008-09 recession the youth unemployment rate grew to nearly three times that for prime age adults, rather than double as in previous downturns.”⁹¹

Efforts to tackle child poverty simply by increasing the number of parents in work are held back by the current structure of the labour market. This also acts as a transmission mechanism for inequality, converting educational inequalities into disparities in income and wealth, and related gaps in wellbeing.

Conclusion

Why was this allowed to happen? Some of the rise in inequalities may be attributable to widespread economic and social change. The increased movement of global labour and capital has exerted, and continues to exert immense pressure on most Western economies, leading to changes in the balance between manufacturing and service industries, and downward pressures on wages. But many choices remain for national policymakers in how to respond to such pressures and to try and ensure that the benefits of globalisation are shared more evenly.

Labour inherited a situation in which inequalities had risen substantially for over a decade.⁹² Attempts were made to redress these, particularly in terms of income and educational opportunities, against a background in which inequality was seen as potentially politically toxic. Yet reluctance to challenge a dominant climate of opinion that saw interfering in markets as undesirable meant that the drivers of inequality, whether in the housing market, the structure of education, or as we focus on here, in the labour market, went unaddressed. Part of this problem is how tackling inequality has been portrayed as leveling down, rather than an essential part of developing a positive vision of a fairer society, or, as we suggest below, of decent childhoods for all.

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Part 5 Decent childhoods – a more positive vision

We need a positive vision for what a society free of child poverty might look like. We argue that much of what people care about when talking about child poverty can be expressed in the idea of a decent childhood. A society free of child poverty would be one in which this was a reality for all children. Our conception of a decent childhood is one in which all children live in families with financial security, all children have meaningful opportunities; and all children are valued.

Labour's approach to tackling child poverty achieved significant reductions in the number of children living below the poverty line, but had failures at the level of politics and policy. In political terms, child poverty largely failed to resonate outside of a narrow policy elite. In policy terms, the agenda failed to adequately confront the challenges posed by a polarised labour market and increased inequalities in income, wealth and opportunity, and paid too little attention to the lived experience of people in poverty. We think that addressing these failures requires reframing the mission to tackle child poverty.

We do not underestimate the force and importance of the term and concept of poverty. As David Piachaud argued influentially three decades ago, the term poverty carries with it '*an implication and moral imperative that something should be done about it.*'⁹³ But while poverty remains a vital part of the analysis, it can be unhelpful in framing the solutions. Focusing on poverty too often means constantly defining a group of 'the poor'. What this suggests, to those both sympathetic, and those not, is that the challenges faced by this group are very different than those faced by others, including those who may be living in poverty but are highly disinclined to accept that label.

This is neither helpful to fostering any notion of solidarity or shared fate nor a reflection of what the evidence tells us. Countless research shows that poverty is dynamic; few are poor permanently, many experience recurrent poverty, reflecting the fluctuations and complications of employment and family life in the bottom half of the income distribution. We have known this for a while, yet we have found it hard to adapt our language or policy to accommodate this reality; the static view of poverty seems easier to conceptualise and articulate. While poverty retains important explanatory power in our understanding of the dynamics that shape our society it lacks a resonance with how most people understand the social challenges we currently face. Poverty 'others' the poor, and places them in a group apart from us, rather than describing a set of issues and risks that confront many families, and against which most would wish to be protected.

We want to put forward an idea that captures what it is that we intrinsically care about when we talk about the eradication of child poverty. Our concept of a decent childhood is an initial attempt to present a positive vision for policy that can help to both communicate and shape the debate about childhood disadvantage. We hope that it provokes debate about what such a vision should look like.

The concept of a decent childhood comprises three aspirations:

- All children live in families with financial security;
- All children have meaningful opportunities; and
- All children are valued.

What do we mean by a decent childhood?

When talking about child poverty in discussions we were constantly asked to define what exactly child poverty meant. Any technical response failed to capture the broader meanings of poverty we heard back from participants; the ideas that poverty was about a child '*having options in life*',⁹⁴ and that poverty was not just about what gets '*put on the plate*', but about access to holidays, recreational activity and quality of life.⁹⁵ The concept of poverty as a deficit – of money or of opportunity – can fail to convey the positive vision of what a childhood free from poverty would look like.

We believe that child poverty is wrong because it damages children's experiences of childhood, blights their opportunities, and leaves young people feeling unvalued. We think a decent childhood should be built on the pillars of security, opportunity and feeling valued.

This approach differs from recent attempts to define the elements of a 'good' childhood⁹⁶ or to measure the elements of children's wellbeing. While we want to suggest the elements that we think are essential in underpinning any such conception, we do not want to describe any one particular type of childhood, or to suggest that our overarching goal is to improve children's subjective 'happiness'. Rather, it draws on the work on 'capabilities' developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, which argues that in assessing the justice of any particular society, we should focus on *"the central and valuable things in life that people can actually do and be"*.⁴ Analysis of resources alone may not be able to achieve this, due to the fact that different people require different levels of resource to achieve the same outcomes, as the example of disability clearly illustrates.⁹⁷ Nussbaum's take on this approach suggests that we set out a central set of human capabilities, things that everybody should be able to do and have.⁵ This is not a list of things that 'everybody should be doing', rather, it seeks to set out a minimum level of conditions that must be obtained for a society to be seen to be treating its citizens fairly. Our pillars mirror the dimensions of equality which underpinned the equality measurement framework developed by Burchardt and others based on outcomes (financial security), autonomy (meaningful opportunities), and processes (feeling valued).⁹⁸

Here we present an idea of the minimum conditions that would enable us to say that we are providing all children with a decent childhood. We describe what we mean within each of the three dimensions, briefly present where we stand now (drawing on section one) and suggest a leading indicator by which this could be measured. Clearly, the dimensions, their descriptions and the indicators are open to debate, and are suggested here more as a starting point for such discussion, rather than a final version. However, the key point that we want to convey is that policies need to attend to all three of these areas in order to deliver.

Financial security

"We have families round here who cannot afford to buy their children proper footwear clothing, they can't afford to pay the school for trips going out, proper meals..."

Derby discussion group

"For me, when I hear the term child poverty, it doesn't mean what you put on a plate... it also means, because learning doesn't take place just in the classroom, it means holidays.....and decent food.....it means eating healthily – five a day."

Gingerbread discussion group

"Recreation facilities... nobody can afford to go on holiday...but they're being cut back. My kids stay in the house and stare at the walls, because there is no money for holidays, activities."

Gingerbread discussion group

Achieving financial security for all families would mean that no child had to worry that their family would go without basic material necessities, or feel that they were missing out on the things that most families take for granted. It would mean freeing children from the worry and stress that can mar family life, characterised by financial shocks, debts and insecure employment, and helping more to achieve the sense of security and a base to plan from that a stable income and access to assets can bring.

We know that too many children miss out on things that other families take for granted.

These are the kinds of items that are tracked in material deprivation surveys or emerged out of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's public workshops on minimum income standards. Table 1 highlights those items used to measure material deprivation. They are items that people say they want but cannot afford. The items are basic, and the differences between the bottom 20% and top 20% are stark.

4 The clearest example of this is with disability; a family with a disabled child may require significantly more resources to be able, for example, to take a family holiday, than a family in which the children do not experience disabilities.

5 Nussbaum's list is: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotion; practical reason and the ability to form a conception of the good life; affiliation with others, including having the social bases of self respect; (access to) other species; play; and control over one's environment, both political and material.

Table 1 Material deprivation by income quintile
Percentage lacking specific items who would like the item but say they cannot afford them (£ values based on family of 2 adults and 2 children)

	% Lacking certain items		
	Bottom 20% <£12686	Middle 20% £18876 – 25896	Top 20% >£36816
Child Deprivation Items			
Outdoor space / facilities to play safely	18	9	3
Enough bedrooms for every child 10 years or over and of a different gender	29	12	3
Celebrations on special occasions	8	2	0
Leisure equipment such as sports equipment or a bicycle	16	5	1
At least one week's holiday away from home with family	61	29	7
Hobby or leisure activity	15	4	1
Swimming at least once a month	23	7	1
Friends round for tea or a snack once a fortnight	18	5	1
Go on school trip at least once a term	13	4	1
Go to a playgroup at least once a week	12	8	1
Adult Deprivation Items			
Money to decorate home	36	14	2
Hobby or leisure activity	33	17	3
Holiday away from home one week a year not with relatives	69	35	8
Home contents insurance	43	12	1
Friends round for drink / meal at least once a month	34	14	2
Make savings of 10 pounds a month or more	68	38	10
Two pairs of all weather shoes for each adult	21	7	1
Replace worn out furniture	55	30	8
Replace broken electrical goods	44	19	3
Money to spend on self each week	59	32	6
Keep house warm	22	8	1

Source: DWP (2011) *Households Below Average Income*

But beyond day to day costs there are wider implications. Just as a persistent income translates into wealth and assets, persistent low income turns into debt. Assets play a huge role in supporting people making choices in their lives. If you can't put money away, you can never make strategic investments in your future, such as paying for a course or investing in starting a new business.⁹⁹ In a precarious situation, unexpected costs – a broken fridge, a funeral, damp in the home - can knock a family off a tightrope. Debt, when used to make ends meet, simply eats into already meagre incomes, limiting choices. Poverty and debt have a major impact on mental health. The national Debtline claims that "72% of clients at National Debtline tell us that being in debt makes them physically ill." At present, nearly a quarter of families say that their money 'always', 'most often' or 'more often than not' ran out by the end of the month and over one in ten couple families, and over one in four lone parent families say they worry about money 'almost all the time'.¹⁰⁰

How will we know when we have achieved this?

We think that the indicators currently set out in the child poverty act capture the idea of financial security well, and should remain the headline indicators in this area. These measure relative low income, that is living below 60 per cent of the median; absolute low income, defined as a living below the poverty line as it was in 2010; low income and material deprivation combined, and a measure of persistent poverty, living below 60 per cent of the median for three consecutive years.

Meaningful opportunities

“Better quality of life for myself and children. Think about education for all, not just the kids but the parenting as well. Not just academic, all types of education.”

Gingerbread discussion group

The rhetoric of life chances and social mobility has gained increased traction in recent years, with the current Government commissioning Frank Field to write a review on ‘poverty and life chances’,¹⁰¹ and publishing its own Social Mobility strategy.¹⁰² But in talking about opportunities we want to go further than the aim expressed by Frank Field to *“change the distribution of income by changing the position which children from poor backgrounds will be able to gain by merit in the income hierarchy.”*¹⁰³ Ensuring opportunities for all children means that particular educational and employment pathways do not condemn them to a life of disadvantage and disrespect. Not everyone wants a prestigious professional role (nor are there enough to go round) and increasing opportunity is about more than ensuring that there are equal opportunities to join a small number of elite professions. A society in which all children had decent opportunities would be not only one with greater chances of ‘success’, but one in which success was more broadly defined. This means a more equal society.

Much discussion of social mobility focuses on poverty of aspiration.¹⁰⁴ Yet this too often ignores the fact that life plans are shaped by both the objective realities and subjective norms of families, schools, and wider social networks. It is hard to foster aspiration in a vacuum of genuine opportunity.¹⁰⁵ Creegan highlights the “truncated opportunities” of disadvantage; aspirations exist but life events and experiences narrow the funnel of possibilities; educational failure, health set-backs, financial shocks all hit the disadvantaged most frequently and with the greatest intensity.¹⁰⁶ As we set out above, persistent inequalities remain that undermine the chance for all to succeed, including inequalities in income, wealth, education and labour market opportunities.

The publication of Wilkinson and Pickett’s Spirit Level, alongside the banking crisis, forced the issue of inequality onto a much wider agenda. But a narrow focus on Gini coefficient inequality keeps the debate in a box, often fixed on levels of progressive taxation. A commitment to decent opportunities for all children must be rooted in a sustained attack on the persistent inequalities that undermine the chance for all to succeed.

How will we know when we have achieved this?

We think there is a strong case to be made for the leading indicator in this area to focus on educational achievement. Education is both a reflection of and transmission mechanism for inequalities; as Gregg and Macmillan conclude,

*“the relationship between family income and education is [also] one of the key drivers of intergenerational income mobility across time in the UK.”*¹⁰⁷

Labour recognised this, but a focus on overall targets failed to translate this into a consistent focus on the most disadvantaged. Setting ‘floor’ targets as the primary measure of educational attainment – a level which every child must meet, rather than a goal that a proportion of children meet a certain standard – would be one way to, as Lupton et al put it, *“remove the current pressures on schools to focus on learners who, with a little extra help, can pass the tests, at the expense of those whose learning journey will be slower and more complex”*¹⁰⁸ and to ensure every child a minimum level of opportunity. Setting these for 18 year olds, the new school leaving age, would require a focus on narrowing inequalities in education and in the factors that influence children’s achievement, throughout their childhoods. A minimum staging post for this target would be universal literacy and numeracy by the end of primary school, giving all children the opportunity to thrive in secondary education.

All children should feel valued

“Loser Double Loser - your mum works in McDonalds”

Playground Taunt

“The state has perceptions of the population - if you're unemployed and poor, then you're the undeserving poor because you haven't got a job...”

Derby discussion Group

“To be alienated is to lack a sense of belonging, to be cut off from family, friends, school or work – the four worlds of childhood”

Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Alienation and the Four Worlds of Childhood*¹⁰⁹

Children's sense that they are valued may sound nebulous, perhaps easier to identify in its absence than presence. It connects to identity, security, sense of worth, and may well be rooted firmly in the factors mentioned above; security and opportunity. There have been persistent worries expressed about the experience of children in the UK since Unicef concluded in 2007 that their wellbeing was the lowest in Europe.¹¹⁰ Undoubtedly these issues are exacerbated for the most disadvantaged.

The language and approach of policymakers has too often lacked any empathy for what it must mean to be a child growing up in low income Britain. Even at its best policy is often framed as if child poverty solutions are investments in children and young people's future rather than in the intrinsic quality of their present.

The philosopher Stephen Darwall distinguishes between 'recognition' respect; in which persons are given due weight in the considerations of others, and 'appraisal respect', the type of respect that comes from performing a function well.¹¹¹ When we argue that all children should feel valued, we are talking about this type of 'recognition' respect; that every child feels that their interests count.

This sense is clearly first engendered within the family. Good parenting is the first way in which children realise that they are valued, and poor parenting can damage this.¹¹² But it is also influenced by the wider environment both through its effects on parents and directly through the support of others, the relationship with school and other local institutions, and increasingly the wider realm through media, old and new.

As we set out above, children who lack material necessities often experience an acute sense of stigma and shame - a sense that they are not fully part of their peer group. This process of poverty as 'othering' as described by Ruth Lister,¹¹³ is exacerbated by the way in which 'the poor' are referred to in contemporary political discourse, and treated by service providers.

Lack of material goods, lack of recognition and a sense of being valued for children are linked; Unicef's recent report into children's wellbeing in the UK, Sweden and Spain finds that *“In the UK and to a lesser extent in Sweden, high status brands tended to be more important to children from less affluent backgrounds, perhaps as a means of masking financial and social insecurities and bolstering self-esteem.”*¹¹⁴

But addressing this goes further than addressing these inequalities, and involves thinking about our collective language, how services are delivered, and how policies are described; policy determines not only what material possessions people have access to, but what the presence or lack of these possessions means.

How will we know when we have achieved this?

There are established ways of measuring children's sense of self-efficacy and their subjective wellbeing.¹¹⁵ We could examine this dimension by looking at the gaps in these scales between richer and poorer children, and seeking to close them.

An alternative way of capturing the extent to which all children feel that their interests count might be to look at the way that we literally count these interests through the democratic system. The social class gap that we noted in political participation is growing and is pronounced among young people.¹¹⁶ The status quo represents a vicious circle – the less a group votes, the less they matter – politicians no longer need to speak to their interests and instead are able to use them as a political football.

Examining voting turnout at age 18-23 might be one way to measure the extent to which policy has been able to engender in children a sense of their own belonging (or what we might call a sense of civic

belonging or citizenship), a sense that their views are valued. For many young people of all backgrounds, voting may not be the way in which they express their political views. But the social gradient in electoral participation and the alienation it expresses is both a symptom and a cause of the needs of the most disadvantaged being ignored.

Notes

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Part 6 Realising change

We propose three drivers of change that will be necessary to ensure decent childhoods for all; full employment, a focus on education for life, and the creation of a shared sense of responsibility. A full employment policy must work to promote a fairer distribution of the rewards from work, ensure that all have opportunities to participate, and promote a better balance between work and family life. Policies that focus on education must build secure foundations for learning and focus on universal attainment goals, narrow attainment gaps, and provide second chances for those who have missed out on educational success. Creating a shared sense of responsibility means that language used by those with power and influence must not stigmatise those without, that services are respectful of the agency and expertise of the people they serve, and that this agenda is an inclusive call to action.

What would need to happen to ensure decent childhoods for all? Here we set out the changes that will be necessary for all children to live in families which are financially secure, all children to have opportunities that they can pursue, and for all to feel valued and part of society. There are not single policies that will deliver this agenda. It is about a programme of action, and cultural change which reorients in whose interests our society is organised.

The connections between our priority areas are critical. Many critiques of existing policies or approaches rest on the idea that they target only one of these dimensions; that increasing family incomes underplays the importance of opportunity; that focusing on children's educational outcomes presents children as an 'investment' rather than valuing them as children; or that measures to increase children's aspiration in decision making ignore the wider realities that shape their lives. Our key test for policies is that they deliver on all three areas.

We have characterised Labour's approach to child poverty as based on three strands: increasing financial support, welfare to work policy, and investment in children's opportunities. The current Government, in contrast, state that their approach involves the five areas of tackling worklessness, tackling debt, strengthening families, tackling educational failure, and tackling poor health, with an additional focus on delivery in communities.¹¹⁷ Here we put forward three alternative areas of focus as a means of ensuring decent childhoods for all:

- Full employment;
- A focus on education for life; and
- A shared sense of responsibility.

Rather than attempting to set out a detailed policy blueprint, we suggest key tests that policy in each area must pass in order to deliver the necessary change.

Focusing on these as priorities should not obscure the fact that the nature of the taxation burden, adequacy in the social security system and the state of child maintenance are all vitally important. A policy of full employment does not negate the need for reasonable incomes for those outside paid work, particularly given the level of conditionality now embedded within the system. Countries which redistribute market incomes effectively, have lower rates of child poverty, better child well-being, and lower health inequalities.¹¹⁸ But as market inequalities deepen, this task gets harder. Firstly, as was often pointed out during Labour's period in office, improving living standards for those at the bottom in a situation of increasing inequality is like running up a down escalator. Secondly, as interventions become more expensive, and the call for better 'targeting' and 'means-testing' grows, the divisions between recipients and non-recipients of social support widen, undermining the solidarity on which this support rests.¹¹⁹ Thirdly, a full employment agenda focuses the debate on people's desire for decent work and the barriers to achieving this, rather than on who 'deserves' to get support from the state.

Decent Childhoods: an overview

	Decent Childhoods		
Vision	Financial Security	Meaningful Opportunities	Feeling Valued
Indicators	60% median income, material deprivation	Attainment at age 18	Social gradient in youth voting turnout
Drivers of Change	Full Employment	Education for life	Sharing Responsibility
Tests for policy, practice and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does it promote a fairer distribution of the rewards from work? Does it ensure that all have opportunities to participate in paid work? Does it ensure a better balance between paid work and family life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does it promote secure foundations? Does it narrow the attainment gap? Does provide second chance balance between paid work and family life? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the language used by those with power and influence stigmatise those without? Are services respectful of the agency and expertise of the people they are designed to serve? Can this agenda be an inclusive call to action?

Full employment

The first area identified, active intervention in the labour market, is the critical driver able to boost the chances of family financial security, opportunities for all children, and a sense that all children are valued. The relationship between work, pay and unpaid work has changed beyond all recognition in the past 30 years, and underpins much of what poverty means in 21st century Britain. With the notable exception of the introduction of the National Minimum Wage, successive governments have focused on the supply side of the labour market, tightening conditionality rules for those on benefits, and improving incentives to work through the tax credit system and now Universal Credit. We can no longer remain passive about the kind of labour market we have, the distribution of opportunities, and the wider conditions which characterise the employment experience of the low paid. Improving the education system throughout life and encouraging a sense of shared responsibility throughout society are vital ingredients of improving children's lives. But it is in the labour market that many of the consequences of policies in these areas are played out; improving educational outcomes will do little to increase opportunities if there are no jobs to go to; measures that seek to change how we see 'the poor' are meaningless if not accompanied by measures to decrease poverty itself.

As we set out in part one, current employment opportunities offer too little to too few families.

- The UK has a higher proportion of workless families than other European nations.
- There are major geographical disparities in jobs and earnings;
- Pay remains highly unequal.

- Many low paid workers experience low job security.
- Opportunities to progress within the labour market are poor.

There is little more that can be achieved with labour market activation policies alone. Conditionality has been ramped up throughout the system for almost all claimants, and the effectiveness of sanctions alone at helping people to enter work remains unclear.⁶ Analysis of the Flexible New Deal, the precursor to the Government's Work Programme, suggests that it was on course to get around 17 per cent of clients into a job lasting six months or more. The same analysis suggests that the Work Programme will, in an optimistic scenario, achieve success rates of around 26 per cent – well below the Government's expectations.¹²⁰ DWP is about to embark on an ambitious programme of in-work conditionality, designed to increase people's earnings, but there are no clear indications of how this will be resourced, or how it will work in practice.¹²¹

Following the financial crisis, the question that will dominate public policy debate is what type of policies will promote sustainable growth. Yet as many, including the Sarkozy Commission led by Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz, have concluded, a narrow focus on GDP growth is insufficient to meet many of society's collective aspirations.¹²² Some are thinking about how a return to growth could also promote a different type of economy. The IPPR's commission on *Promoting Growth and Shared Prosperity across the UK* sets out to

“develop a new framework for the UK economy, set out ways in which UK companies could change to better exploit their advantages in the global economy, and identify how increased prosperity can be shared across the regions and nations of the UK and through fairer pay and full employment.”¹²³

The Resolution Foundation's *Commission on Living Standards* is examining the fact that since 2003, wages have been flat for 'low to middle earners.'

This work reflects a recognition that the economy has not delivered for low wage workers. In order to deliver decent childhoods for all, we think that any strategy for growth needs to meet three tests:

- Does it promote a fairer distribution of the rewards from work?
- Does it ensure that all have opportunities to participate in paid work?
- Does it ensure a better balance between paid work and family life?

Promoting a fairer distribution of the rewards from paid work through wages and training

As we set out in section one, lower earners have experienced a declining share of the benefits of economic growth over the last thirty years.¹²⁴ Opportunities within the workplace to increase skills through training and advancement are also unevenly distributed: the proportion of individuals with degrees receiving training is five times as high as the proportion for those with no qualifications, and the proportion of those receiving training in professional occupations almost three times higher as that for people in elementary ones.⁷ Training is distributed in inverse relation to need.

These developments are not inevitable. A distinction is often drawn between 'high road' strategies to productivity involving human capital investment, often exemplified by John Lewis, and 'low road' approaches involving the use of large numbers of temporary workers. Comparative research by the Russell Sage Foundation shows that there is considerable variation among the UK, US and other European countries in the conditions for low wage workers, with 'inclusive' industrial relations (such as national collective bargaining) leading to a better quality of life for the low paid. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation into employers role in the 'low pay, no pay' cycle found that although the core elements driving employer behaviour were cost pressures, fluctuations in demand, and the availability of suitable labour, leading many employers to use large numbers of temporary workers, some employers *“placed more emphasis on the importance and benefits of developing a committed workforce.”*¹²⁵

6 A recent review by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on the use of benefit sanctions found that: *“Unemployment benefit sanctions in European systems have generally had positive effects on short-term outcomes: reducing unemployment duration and raising employment rates. However, leaving unemployment benefit earlier, prompted by sanctions, can result in poorer quality employment (lower earnings and instability)”* and that *“Qualitative evidence suggests that, although the threat of sanctions may encourage participation, sanctions themselves do little to change motivation to work.”* (Griggs, J. and Evans, M. (2010) *Sanctions within conditional benefit systems: a review of the evidence* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.)

7 20 per cent of those with degrees receive training, compared to 4 per cent of those with no qualifications, 22 per cent of those in professional occupations had received training in the last four weeks, compared to 8 per cent of those in elementary occupations. (UK Commission on Employment and Skills (2010) *Ambition 2020: World Class Skills and Jobs for the UK* London: UKCES).

Labour continually exhorted business to increase training,⁸ seemingly with little success.⁹ As the Good Work commission recently concluded, investment in training pays off, citing research that “employees who felt that their employers were supportive of their desire to engage in training and development activity were more productive, had greater commitment to the organisation and were significantly less likely to resign.”¹²⁶ With little signs of success for the voluntary approach, the alternatives are either incentives for those employers follow the ‘high road strategy’ or penalties for those who do not. The JRF research also found that public sector contracting models could play a key role in driving employer behaviour, and this might be one place to start.

Ensuring that all have opportunities to participate in paid work – job guarantees

The concentration of employment in some regions of the UK denies too many families the opportunity to participate in paid work. Those areas that experienced significant industrial decline also saw significant increases in the proportion of those claiming benefits,¹²⁷ and while London is an exception to this pattern, the distribution of paid work within London also inhibits the ability of many families to take up jobs.¹²⁸ A new employment strategy needs to concentrate as much on ensuring that there are opportunities to participate in employment as it does on exhorting the unemployed to find work.

One approach to this that saw some success in Labour’s final period in office was the offer of a guaranteed job to young people who had been out of work for six months through the Future Jobs Fund. This began to change the state’s relationship with claimants, offering them the chance for genuine opportunity and greater financial security. It also started to offer the greater integration between local employers and welfare to work providers that has long been the goal of welfare to work policy: the Department for Work and Pensions’ select committee report into the operation (and cancellation) of the Future Jobs Fund concluded that while it was not yet possible to assess the cost-effectiveness of the programme compared to other employment interventions. “There is... strong evidence that employer recruitment processes and selection behaviours have been significantly changed as a result of experiences gained through the FJF.” and that “Valuable local partnerships have been built up under the Future Jobs Fund which draw on knowledge of local labour markets and the needs of communities”¹²⁹ While the priority must remain ensuring responses to the critical challenge of youth unemployment, the extension of this guarantee to the long term unemployed, to people with disabilities and health conditions, and to parents, would offer the means for local areas to think strategically about the integration of regional development policy with opportunities for local people.

Promoting a balance between paid work and family life; childcare is still central

Any employment strategy needs to address the balance between paid work and family life, and the distribution of paid work and caring between men and women. We know that countries with low child poverty rates are those that combine high maternal employment rates with low in-work poverty. Bearing in mind the importance of valuing children this strategy must be about more than just moving more women into the workplace. Jane Waldfogel’s research on U.S. welfare reform shows that despite the large increase in female employment that followed the tightening of benefit eligibility rules, this increase was not accompanied by additional spending on children, and there were few positive impacts on child health and development outcomes, with some adverse impacts on 10 and 11 year olds.¹³⁰ Any strategy needs to address the distribution of working and caring within households – so that it is normal for both partners in a couple, or for a single parent to be able to combine paid work with caring.

Flexible working policies, participation tax rates and parental leave policies are important here. People in the U.K. work the longest hours in Europe. A fairer share of work, perhaps through greater job sharing, could benefit both those who are short on income and those who are short on time.

But as has long been argued, the critical policy lever in this area is still childcare. Affordable, universal, quality childcare is what enables the far more equal distribution of paid and unpaid work in the Scandinavian countries, and their low rates of child poverty.¹³¹ That this is a familiar point does not diminish its importance. The OECD’s 2011 report on families across Europe points out once again Britain’s high childcare costs,¹³² and the costs of paying for childcare threaten to derail the promise of the Universal Credit to ‘make work pay’.¹³³

8 For example, the Leitch report in 2006 recommended “a new ‘Pledge’ for employers to voluntarily commit to train all eligible employees up to Level 2 in the workplace” (Leitch Review of Skills (2006) *Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills* London: The Stationary Office).

9 The UK Commission on Employment and Skills’ 2010 report found that both participation in employer provided training and employer expenditure on training declined between 2007-09, although the impact of the recession obviously needs to be borne in mind here

Education for life

Education is vital both to enable people to access existing work, and develop the evolving careers characteristic of contemporary life, but also to drive the high road employment strategy discussed above. This means more than simply talking about 'schools policy'. At present, the education system fails to redress disadvantage in the early years, and fails again while children go through primary and secondary school, leaving too many young adults with negative attitudes to education which are then passed on to their own children. Replacing this vicious circle with a virtuous one requires a focus on addressing educational inequalities at every stage; providing the foundations for learning in the early years and primary school, narrowing avoidable attainment gaps during the period from secondary school to eighteen, and providing second chances to learn throughout adulthood, in turn enhancing parents' perceptions of education, and their children's aspirations. These three stages form our three 'tests' for policy in this dimension.

Secure foundations

There is now cross party consensus on the need to invest in children's early years. Backed up by strong findings on the importance of early education on children's development, and the diverging prospects faced by children from 22 months onwards, Labour's investment in Sure Start appears to be supported by the current Government, who commissioned Frank Field to write a report on Child Poverty and Early Years Policy, and Graham Allen to look into early intervention. While there is a substantial evidence base around early years interventions, there is less understanding of how to implement these at scale and reaching those who may need it most.¹³⁴

UNICEF suggest that a minimum benchmark for expenditure on early childhood education and care from 0-6 years should be 1 per cent of GDP,¹³⁵ an additional £9 billion in UK terms predominantly to improve significantly qualification levels of staff.¹³⁶

For the rhetoric around early years to be translated into a real improvement in children's opportunities, a path needs to be found towards this level of investment.

Much of the evidence on early years interventions that inspired the development of Sure Start in the UK have showed that the gains made had to be built upon. Yet primary education does not currently appear to do this. While there are strong professional views as to how to create the right environments for children to thrive at primary school the Effective Preschool and Primary Education Study (EPPE) Study was unequivocal that primary school and teacher quality had an important independent effect on English and maths attainment for children, but especially so for the most disadvantaged.¹³⁷ In addition the study observed significant variation on these quality measures. All children should leave school with the basic foundations of adequate literacy and numeracy.

Narrowing the gap

We suggested that the gap in attainment at age 18 should be the leading indicator in terms of whether all children are being given opportunities to succeed. Labour made progress in this area – albeit slow – so we know that policy in this area can produce results. However concerns have also been raised that the framing of the target perversely influenced children's educational choices in ways that may not have been in their best interests, and may have obscured a far slower real pace of change. Under Labour an approach emerged which focussed on freer structures, promoting choice and competition alongside extra resources for disadvantaged pupils.¹³⁸ With the emergence of 'Free Schools', acceleration of the academies programme, including primary schools, and the inception of the Pupil Premium, this approach is being maintained by the current coalition. Its detractors will argue that it will intensify social segregation in schools and that there is nothing to force schools to use their premium money on those students and the amounts barely scratch the surface of need. Proponents argue that the new structures boost innovation and creativity that has been stifled in the comprehensive approach to date. These debates are likely to continue. Our argument is that a key measure of success of these policies must be to achieve minimum standards for all including the most disadvantaged. This means that both Government and schools need to be held accountable to this agenda.

This will not be achieved within a model in which educational success is defined only in terms of pathways to traditional academic higher education degrees. We know that a range of capabilities such as cultural capital and personal skills, creativity, self-confidence and motivation are vital products of education, and that school is a key site for the development of children's sense that they are valued, as well as their access to opportunities. How our education can provide these for all irrespective of the educational path young people take remains a major challenge.¹³⁹

Second chances

We discussed in the first section the need to increase workplace investment in training, but this needs a backstop for those who are either unable to work, or who want to move out and up from their current employment. One route to this would be to replace the guarantee of a level two educational qualification for all (now significantly eroded by cuts in support for those on inactive benefits) with an aspiration to guarantee that every adult would gain access to a level three qualification, reflecting the aspiration set out in the Leitch review to shift the balance of skills training to this level.

Ensuring that this became a reality could both support many parents' aspirations and have a positive impact on their children's opportunities.¹⁴⁰ Parental support is a critical factor in influencing children's educational success.¹⁴¹ Parents' attitudes to education are shaped by their own experiences - if they have the opportunity to offset a negative experience of school with a positive post 16 engagement in training, this has the potential to help shape their attitudes towards their children's prospects.¹⁰

Sharing responsibility

Arguments about poverty often become polarised; is it the state's responsibility or is it families? These are often used as the straw men; the right accusing the left of ignoring the centrality of family and the left arguing that the right wilfully ignore the role of the state. This is often a false choice. Self-evidently the primary responsibility for raising children lies with families. But context and environment are hugely important determinants of families' capabilities, and the state has a role in shaping that context. But what of others' roles? From the intimate connections that provide social and cultural capital, to the wider influences through civic institutions that shape the broader environment; friends and neighbours, frontline workers, employers, business, press and religious institutions, unions, associations and charities all matter.

The Big Society message has had a mixed reaction. But the idea that in recent years we have not spoken enough about wider society's role has also resonated with many; that the state and market alone do not have all the solutions. This agenda speaks to a wide range of questions about the way we exercise our voice and tackle social concerns. There are many agendas here but the one we focus on is how a shared responsibility for tackling childhood disadvantage can be furthered and what it might mean.

We suggest three tests here:

- Does the language used by those with power and influence stigmatise those without?
- Are public services respectful of the agency and expertise of the people they are designed to serve?
- Can this agenda be an inclusive call to action?

Does the language used by those with power and influence stigmatise those without?

While politicians speak in one voice about their passion for ending child poverty, they are more often heard speaking with equal vigour about the cultures of those who use social security system.¹⁴² No single, non-criminal, group in society is singled out for as much political opprobrium as these. In fact with the extent to which the discussion is framed by the subject of benefit fraud, politicians are often willing to conflate benefit receipt with criminality. This discourse is offensive. Politicians must be held to account when myths are propagated in order to gain political capital on the backs of a supposed "undeserving poor".

If politicians believe there are policies that undermine self-reliance they are entitled to pursue them. If they have a vision that they would like to inspire people to change their behaviour, they should articulate it and see if people follow. But the negative portrayal of the least powerful group in society by those with money, education, and clout is playground bullying.

¹⁰ A comprehensive review of parental engagement in children's learning for the (then) DfES concluded that: *"the impact of the programmes on pupil achievement and behaviour varies. Where this is part of the aims of the programme (as in family education) and is assessed, there are indications of positive outcomes. In other cases (e.g. parent training) there is evidence to show positive benefits for parents which should lay the foundations for enhanced parental involvement in their child's education" but that "conclusions in this field are limited by weak evaluations."* (Desforges, C. with Abouchaar, A. (2003) *The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review* London: Department for Education and Skills).

But it is not just offensive; it is also ineffective if the interest is in achieving actual change, rather than scoring political points. The constant undermining of those who use the social security system negatively shapes the attitudes of both those individuals and the people who interact with them on a daily basis. This affects the health and self-confidence of those receiving services and is likely to foster prejudice amongst those who provide them; imagine the impact on patients and NHS staff of a high profile Government and media campaign against “health scroungers”.

But we are not going to make progress just by challenging orthodoxies rooted in endemic values and a political calculus that has been part of our political culture for years. The idea of decent childhoods is an attempt to find an alternative positive framing of this issue that does not force a distinction between deserving or not, finding a commonality in an aspiration shared by many, rather than a remedial strategy for a minority group.

Policies and services that recognise their clients’ agency and expertise

At minimum policy and practice should be inoffensive. But at its best it should be empowering, driven by views that place adequate weight on the agency and expertise of clients. The language of client-centred services has saturated policy making discussion in recent years but too often has not permeated the reality.

In *Respect*, Richard Sennett attempts to answer the question of how those who are ‘dependent’ on services provided by the state or community can nevertheless retain their dignity and the respect of their peers. He concludes that the recognition of client autonomy is key; the acknowledgement that the people receiving services know more about their own lives than the people delivering them, however necessary the professional expertise is in order to provide help. The organisation Participle has developed the term ‘relational welfare’ to describe the shift from a transactional model of service delivery to one that is ‘shared, collective and relational’.¹⁴³

A focus on relationships within service delivery is often seen as too ‘touchy feely’ – removed from the hard realities of securing value for money, and clear outcomes. But there is no automatic trade off between these goals, and no need to play off the interests of ‘the taxpayer’ with those of the ‘service user’ – who are, of course, nearly always the same people. A wide range of research suggests that services that focus on the quality of relationships between those delivering and those receiving public services are more effective in delivering intended outcomes. A literature review of the evidence for Community Links found that:

“The relationship between the advisor and the client in employment services has consistently been found to be a key element of a successful approach to helping people into employment.

Pupils who develop positive relationships with teachers go on to achieve better academic results.

People who access advice services funded by civil legal aid are more likely to reveal full information if the advisor builds a trusting and respectful relationship, thus leading to swifter resolution of cases, and clients who are more satisfied with the outcomes.

Patients who experience a good relationship with their healthcare professional are more likely to engage in positive behaviour change”¹⁴⁴

Services delivered with respect not only shape the experience and perceptions of those who use them, but can achieve wider goals more efficiently. Increasingly organisations are testing different ways of designing services from a client centred perspective, and this approach suggests that client experience or satisfaction indicators should be as important a marker of policy success as ‘hard’ outcomes; what matters is not only what works, but how it does so. Moreover research with client groups that understands how particular policies, services and interventions will interact with their values and the fabric of their lives must be a central element of translating evidence into practice.

An inclusive call to action

The idea that the word “poverty” is by its nature a powerful moral call to action has long been an important argument in debates around campaigning and advocacy on the issue. That the word contains moral force is true yet the problem of its lack of resonance creates a barrier. If despite its moral force, it stigmatises, or it doesn’t apply to how many people view their world then its ability to act as a call to action is lost. The child poverty agenda failed to ignite a wider set of collective action. To some degree the Government did not even try. But when the Government or activists tried, they largely didn’t succeed. The consistent challenge campaigners faced in finding those affected by poverty to front their campaigns highlights the limits of the narrative.

What about a more inclusive call to action; too many children in the UK lack decent childhoods? It is an argument that may resonate with families who experience this, with frontline workers who come across this on a daily basis and with a wider group of the electorate who see injustice and unfairness, but maybe don't call it poverty. Perhaps it builds a narrative that can draw together the concerns of those who may otherwise seem disconnected from those campaigning against inequalities linked to the UK financial system, to others inspired to assist at in their local community. Perhaps it could also provide a narrative to bring together the myriad of charities and campaigning organisations seeking to advocate for a better UK for children.

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Part 7 Conclusion

The changes we set out as necessary to achieve a decent childhood for all in the 21st century are ambitious. But one clear conclusion to be drawn from the experience of the child poverty target is that ambitious aspirations can drive change. Although we identify failings with Labour's approach to child poverty, no-one should doubt that many children's lives have been significantly improved due to the impetus lent to policy from setting and pursuing a target to end child poverty, after decades in which this trend had gone in the wrong direction.

Our suggestion is that a positive vision of decent childhoods for all can inspire a coalition of support for the type of change needed to achieve it. We think that the need for a better distribution of employment and educational opportunity are messages that resonate with many, although there is clearly debate about how best these should be achieved. The call to challenge the stigmatization that is too often associated with debates around poverty, and particularly benefits poses a different kind of challenge. Many have suggested that those interested in poverty should accept the force of these debates, and seek to draw the line between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' recipients of welfare in a fair and just manner. We think that this approach is more likely to undermine attempts to tackle poverty, constantly reinforcing the message that poverty is primarily a result of individual failure. Reframing the challenge as ensuring that all children have a decent childhood may be a more effective way of inspiring change.

Why focus on children? There has been some discussion of whether the child poverty focus has undermined population wide action on inequality, or just been used euphemistically to avoid confronting more uncomfortable adult poverty. We have sympathy with these perspectives. But we situate the problem of child poverty firmly within this context of wider inequality; the policies and drivers we discuss will by nature have wider impact. Many of the children who will be in poverty in a decade from now have parents who are no longer children, and not yet parents. Any dynamic view of society must see the young unemployed of today as the heart of any strategy to reduce child poverty in the future. But there is both a moral imperative and a compelling argument around wasted potential that justifies a focus on children specifically.

This report is written at a time of enormous uncertainty about the prospects for economic growth and prosperity. The Institute for Fiscal Studies have predicted a decline in living standards across the population, and we do not yet know what impact the continued economic crisis will have. This may be seen as an inauspicious time to call for programmes which require new spending, or for ambitious social goals. We think that this is the wrong response. Politics is about the establishment of priorities, and one thing we know is that Governments will continue to spend – whatever shape or size this spending takes. The current Government has just found £4bn to implement an integration of the tax and benefit system in the form of the Universal Credit, reflecting their belief that work incentives are a, if not the, major explanatory factor for Britain's high rates of poverty and worklessness. Debates over the 50 per cent tax rate show that there are political choices to be made about where resources should be targeted. We think that ensuring that all children have decent childhoods should be the priority for public spending.

The framework we set out suggests that much of what is needed to deliver decent childhoods will be achieved by changes in the way that economic rewards are distributed by the market, and that Government should play an active part here in addition to direct spending. How to achieve this must be a key part of the question of how to return to prosperity – not an afterthought, or a 'nice to have', that comes after the 'serious' economic questions have been answered.

Ensuring that money is spent wisely is obviously vital, and interventions, for example in the field of education, need to be based on the best quality evidence of what works to deliver desired outcomes. We have substantial amounts of good quality research in this area, although major challenges remain in translating the findings of pilot interventions into large-scale programmes. 'Evidence based policy making' remains key – but we need to be clear about the aims of this policy, and against what criteria these will be assessed. The framework we set out for policy is one attempt to do this.

We believe there are important messages here not just for national policymakers but also those working at a local level, and for advocates within the child poverty field. The policy tests equally apply at the local level and a focus on stigma and value applies to all.

We want to encourage a focus on macro level solutions as well as micro; while there will always be a need for good, quick, policy ideas, we think that these need to sit within a framework which looks more broadly at the drivers of change. This is one attempt to take that broad look. We hope to provide an impetus for debate and deliberation on how best to achieve a decent childhood for all. Ultimately we hope politicians, professionals and activists find in it a spur for action.

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