



All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiry into ending the need for foodbanks

Feeding Liverpool submission on behalf
of Liverpool's Good Food Community
Advocacy and Policy Group



**Feeding
Liverpool**

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1. About this submission

The Good Food Community Advocacy and Policy Group, was established in May 2022 as part of Liverpool's Good Food Plan.

Feeding Liverpool is the city of Liverpool's food alliance, connecting and equipping people and organisations to work towards good food for all.

This report has been compiled by Dr Naomi Maynard, Good Food Programme Director. Naomi leads Feeding Liverpool and is co-chair of the Good Food Community Advocacy and Policy Group. Members of the Good Food Community Advocacy and Policy Group would be happy to provide oral evidence in September and October if required.

Feeding Liverpool have also coordinated two further submissions: a submission on behalf of 20 organisations in the city from the voluntary and public sector, and a submission of evidence from individuals who use emergency food provision. These will be submitted separately.

Liverpool City Council are making their own submission to this inquiry.

2. What can we learn from international examples of best practice in terms of effective emergency provision in supporting people facing destitution?

Response written by Ellen Schwaller, PHD candidate at the University of Liverpool and member of the Good Food Community and Advocacy Policy Group

Food insecurity is rooted in long-term social inequalities. Household income alone is the strongest predictor of being at-risk for experiencing food insecurity.¹ Centring this issue as a symptom of deeper and complex issues is key to understanding the role of various interventions to address both long- and short-term food insecurity. Community-based, food assistance programmes, while important to alleviate temporary food insecurity, are not viable long-term solutions² and in some cases were not successful in reaching all food insecure households experiencing additional crises during the COVID 19 pandemic.³ Fiscal policies supporting families such as targeted cash-transfers lead to better food security outcomes,⁴ and further evidence supports shifting to more comprehensive, population-based fiscal solutions (e.g. a modified universal-basic income and increases to minimum wage) for better outcomes.⁵

Here, examples of targeted (food-based) fiscal interventions from the United States are briefly summarised and examined. Outside of in-kind food provision, interventions in developed countries are split into two approaches: subsidies and income or cash-transfers. These are often aimed at the household or individual experiencing food insecurity. One of the most wide-reaching cash-transfer policies in the US is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). While it is generally considered effective in improving food security for the most disadvantaged, it has been criticised for a number of reasons (e.g., as an entitlement programme there are stigma and barriers to access and gaps for ineligible households experiencing food insecurity).

1 Gundersen C, Kreider B, Pepper J. The economics of food insecurity in the United States. *Appl Econ Perspect Policy*. 2011;33(3); Leete L, Bania N. The effect of income shocks on food insufficiency. *Rev Econ Househ*. 2010;8(4); Sriram U, Tarasuk V. Economic Predictors of Household Food Insecurity in Canadian Metropolitan Areas. *J Hunger Environ Nutr*. 2016;11(1).

2 Loopstra R. Interventions to address household food insecurity in high-income countries. *Proc Nutr Soc*. 2018;77(3):270–81.

3 Men F, Tarasuk V. Food insecurity amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Food charity, government assistance and employment. *Can Public Policy*. 2021;COVID-19(April 2020).

4 Ionescu-Ittu R, Glymour MM, Kaufman JS. A difference-in-differences approach to estimate the effect of income-supplementation on food insecurity. *Prev Med (Baltim) [Internet]*. 2015;70:108–16. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2014.11.017>

5 Gundersen C. Viewpoint: A proposal to reconstruct the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) into a universal basic income program for food. *Food Policy [Internet]*. 2021;101(April):102096. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2021.102096>; Men F, Urquia ML, Tarasuk V. The role of provincial social policies and economic environments in shaping food insecurity among Canadian families with children. *Prev Med (Baltim) [Internet]*. 2021;148(October 2020):106558. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106558>

This well-established and far-reaching programme provides a platform to adapt to address additional needs and leverage for other interventions. During the COVID 19 pandemic this was achieved through top ups to funding and was successful at preventing food insecurity.⁶

Equally, other interventions (e.g. food financing initiatives) can be combined with SNAP to further improve access to healthy foods.⁷ Nationally, double dollar programmes for fresh produce at farmers markets are also leveraged to increase access to fruits and vegetables and simultaneously support the local food system.

Less far-reaching but important to consider is the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program within the USDA. It supports nutrition incentive (NI) programmes, produce prescription programmes, and related training. A recent report demonstrated a two dollar return for every one dollar spent to the local food retail economy along with sustained nutritional benefits and reduced food insecurity to participants in the funded interventions.⁸ The report includes additional details and outcomes of a two-year period of funding for 30 programmes across the US. The breadth of NI programmes funded demonstrate promising local and community-driven models to improve food security and nutrition while supporting the local economy and food system (e.g., doubling dollars at local farmers' markets, subsidising community supported agriculture shares). It also highlights programmes that support both accessibility and availability of healthy food (e.g., mobile markets).

This type of initiative marries community-based knowledge of local systems and needs with the necessary infrastructure and support from larger government funding; however, the temporary nature of this grant-making process is cause for concern and must be combined with long-term efforts to address root causes of food insecurity. Leaning on community-based efforts and charities rather than comprehensive reform is a dangerous approach especially when faced with extreme shocks. Ensuring more permanent, government-based structures need to be in place to support households at risk of and those already experiencing food insecurity.

6 Bryant A, Follett L. Hunger relief: A natural experiment from additional SNAP benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Lancet Reg Heal - Am* [Internet]. 2022;10:100224. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2022.100224>

7 Cantor J, Beckman R, Collins RL, Dastidar MG, Richardson AS, Dubowitz T. SNAP participants improved food security and diet after a full-service supermarket opened in an urban food desert. *Health Aff.* 2020;39(8).

8 Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition. Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (GusNIP NTAE): Impact Findings [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://www.nutritionincentivehub.org/media/fjohmr2n/gusnip-ntae-impact-findings-year-2.pdf>

3. How can rights-based approaches be used to support people facing destitution (for example, a statutory right to food, right to social security)? What role could these approaches play in tackling short-term crises and ending the need for food banks?

Response written by Lucy Antal, Lead for Food Justice, Feedback¹, member of the Good Food Community and Advocacy Policy Group and BBC Food & Farming Awards Community Food Champion 2021.

First Covid-19, and now the cost of living crisis, have highlighted the simple inequity within society at present. Low paid jobs, with zero hours contracts, the complicated universal credit welfare system, and now the bumpy shift to digital for healthy start vouchers has left many households struggling to put food on the table. In a world where energy and transport costs are rising rapidly, and the cost of housing and council tax is also rising by % increments each year, food is often the only “moveable” bit of the household budget. Destitution is often only a missed pay check away (due to illness for example, as statutory sick pay is only £99 a week). The complex bureaucracy behind social security payments means waits of up to 5 weeks for support, so food aid organisations end up providing support.

A rights-based approach, on a cash first basis, creates a breathing space within this maelstrom of outside stressors. Citizens would truly have a safety net if this was enshrined in law. Food is a building block of life and we cannot survive long without it. Enabling or triggering immediate payments gives people agency and choice over their food purchasing and would support community initiatives such as food pantries, where a small fee membership gives access to a wider range of low-priced items. Food banks only work in a short-term capacity, and were indeed created as an emergency response for absolute destitution. They have now become ubiquitous, but the model is not sustainable – see the linked paper which challenges the “win win” scenario of food surplus redistribution becoming the solver of food insecurity.² At the same time as the rise of the food bank culture, we have seen a reduction in social spaces and citizen support mechanisms that once provided additional support in times of need. Children’s centres, youth services, older people’s social clubs and work canteens have all been whittled away in the past decade of austerity and public money reductions. Food banks are also not agile when it comes to supporting people with dietary or culturally based requirements, they have a rather workhouse approach of you get what you are given.

When you or your children are hungry, there is no room in your head for anything else. Young people in Blackburn with Darwen ran a campaign called #gettinghangry – which referenced the anger caused by hunger, which led to them being excluded from school on behavioural grounds when in fact they needed a meal. A cash first approach, as championed by IFAN (<https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/cash-first>) and the rights based approach from Ian Byrne MP (<https://www.ianbyrne.org/righttofood-campaign>) both seek to enable a basic human right of food

1 www.feedbackglobal.org

2 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodpol.2022.102230>

being available to everyone, regardless of income or location. With over 11M people living in food insecurity, and 7.4M admitting to skipping a meal on a regular basis due to their financial situation, it is past time to consider this option, it needs to be ratified.

5. How can setting income levels, such as Minimum Income Guarantee or a Universal Basic Income, be used to support people facing destitution? What role could these measures play in tackling short-term crisis and ending the need for food banks?

Response written by Revd Dr Tony Bradley, Senior Lecturer in Business, Liverpool Hope University and member of the Good Food Community and Advocacy Policy Group

There has been a significant debate, globally, on the introduction of various forms of guaranteed income or, even Universal Basic Income (UBI) schemes, particularly since the Financial Crash of 2008-09. Several experiments have been introduced in countries as diverse as Canada, Finland and Kenya. Most recently, the Welsh Senedd has introduced a scheme to provide a guaranteed income scheme for care leavers, at the age of 18, to enable them to have a baseline income, to help them, as they leave care and begin independent living.

This scheme, launched in June 2022, has the aim of avoiding the ‘cliff edge’ of moving young people from local authority institutional living, into the adult world, often with no immediate support network around them. The Welsh experiment had been, initially, trailed as one involving UBI¹. But, this confused a range of policy objectives. David Deans² of BBC Wales Politics commented on May 17, 2021:

“Plans are at an early stage, but it seems unlikely it would be a large-scale project. A spokesman for the Welsh government said: “We have followed the progress of universal basic income pilot projects around the world with interest and believe there is an opportunity to test the concept in Wales. There is more work to be done in this area but we are interested in developing a small pilot, potentially involving people leaving care.” In the event, the Welsh scheme has been reported, widely, as an example of UBI, when it is no such thing.

The basics

“Under a UBI system, every citizen, regardless of their means, receives regular sums of money for life to cover the basic cost of living. Its proponents argue that it can alleviate poverty and give people time to retrain and adapt to changing workplaces, be more creative and become more active and engaged. Jonathan Williams, co-founder of the Cardiff UBI Lab, part of the UBI Lab Network, comments: “It’s a 21st-century solution to 21st-century problems – it could be our generation’s NHS...Our generation needs a policy that is going to help people and I think this could really invigorate entrepreneurialism and help local economies.”” (Harris, 2020)³.

1 Morris, S (2021) Wales to launch pilot universal basic income scheme. Guardian online. 14 May; Winckler, V (2020) Some thoughts on a UBI for Wales. The Bevan Foundation. 15 June.

2 Deans, D (2021) Welsh Universal Basic Income pilot could focus on care leavers. BBC New Online. 17 May.

3 Harris, J (2020) Why universal basic income could help us fight the next wave of economic shocks. Guardian online. 3 May; Murray, J (2020) Our generation’s NHS: support grows for universal basic income. Guardian Online. 10 August.

Fundamentally, UBI is a cash benefit provided without conditions to everyone. This conflicts with the essential basis of British welfare policy, which is selectivist in nature, and mistrustful of the universalist principle. As far back as the Elizabethan and Victorian Poor Laws, British social policy has sought to differentiate between ‘the deserving’ and ‘the undeserving’ poor. In the recent past there have been upsurges of populist media outrage, at “overly generous welfare payments”, in terms of “scroungerphobia” (Deacon, 1978, Becker and MacPherson, 1985, Littler and Williamson, 2017, Kaufman, 2021⁴).

But, contemporary shifts in the relationship between work, welfare, fiscal policy and the current debates over cost-of-living crises, food insecurity and shortages - because of supply chain shocks, such as the Ukraine war - have all played into a redrawing of the narrative. The threat to many sources of employment from AI-based automation and changes to the nature of work have led to increasing interest in UBI. Nevertheless, there remains a prevailing attitude that welfare – especially in any universalistic form – leads to people becoming feckless, lazy and workshy.

The debate

The recent experiment with UBI, in Finland, exposed a core fault-line in the debate. In Finland 2,000 people were given a monthly flat payment of €560 (£490; \$634 at the time) from January 2017 to December 2018. The aim was to see if a guaranteed safety net would help people find jobs, and support them if they had to take insecure work. The Finnish experiment was declared unsuccessful, by many in the UK. It did not lead to people becoming more motivated to seek work, all it did was make people feel happier and less worried about the future! In other words, there is a clear divergence between those who see the purpose of basic income as a driver to increasing employment or to improving well-being.

Nor does this split reflect conventional political divisions. Sam Bowman⁵, of the right-wing think-tank, the Adam Smith Institute, wrote in 2013:

“The ideal welfare system is a basic income, replacing the existing anti-poverty programmes the government carries out (tax credits and most of what the Department for Work and Pensions does besides pensions and child benefit). This would guarantee a certain income to people who have no earnings from work at all, and would gradually be tapered out according to earnings for people who do have an income until the tax-free allowance point, at which point they would begin to be taxed”. This is a selectivist, not a universalist standpoint, but since 2013, views have shifted towards UBI, even on the Right. Indeed, the idea of a Negative Income Tax was introduced by Milton Friedman, the high-priest of free-market thinking, and of Reaganomics and Thatcherism, in the 1970s.

4 Deacon, A, (1978) The scrounging controversy: public attitudes towards the unemployed in contemporary Britain. *Social Policy & Administration*, 12, 2, 120-135 ; Becker, S. and MacPherson, S., 1985. Scroungerphobia-where do we stand?. *Social Work Today*, 18(2), p.85; Littler, J and Williamson, M (2017) Rich TV, poor TV: work, leisure, and the construction of “deserved inequality” in contemporary Britain. In *Media and class*, pp. 146-159. Abingdon: Routledge; Kaufman, J (2021) States of Imposture: Scroungerphobia and the Choreography of Suspicion. In *The Imposter as Social Theory*, pp. 171-190. Bristol: Bristol University Press.

5 Bowman, S (2013) The ideal welfare system is a basic income. Adam Smith Institute blogs. 25 November.

The reality

So, could some form of basic income be a better way to address food poverty and insecurity than the presence of food banks, pantries and the like? The blunt fact is that despite the various experiments, the overriding limiting factor is cost. The Welsh Government's new policy is, probably, the most large-scale attempt to introduce basic income anywhere in the world, to date. But it is minimalist in extent, being confined to 18-year olds leaving social care. Clearly, it represents a significant watering-down of Mark Drakeford's initial thinking.

Furthermore, Wales cannot fundamentally change the welfare system for its own citizens, under current devolution arrangements. Benefits are controlled from Westminster not Cardiff. At the time of the announcement of the Welsh pilot, a spokesperson for the Department of Work and Pensions said: "We have no plans to introduce a universal basic income. It would not incentivise work, target those most in need in society, or work for those who need more support, such as disabled people and those with caring responsibilities...our approach to welfare recognises the value of supporting people into well paid work, whilst protecting the most vulnerable in society." It is selectivism writ large.

Another approach would be to provide all households with food vouchers, which could be redeemed at supermarkets and other retail outlets. This was the approach taken during WW2, with rationing. The administration of such schemes is enormous. Furthermore, it flies in the face of the principles surrounding the introduction of "Universal Credit" (which is neither universal nor credit!). Such voucher schemes have the advantage of connecting income payments directly to specific social need. But they are, often, seen as wasteful, cumbersome and, fundamentally paternalistic, rather than trusting people to spend their own money in the most "appropriate" ways.

Despite the ingenuity and forward-thinking nature of many attempts to introduce basic income – and nothing, to date, on the scale of a national UBI – it is likely to flounder on the bases of cost and Britain's reticence towards universalistic welfare provision. Perhaps, the most egalitarian and progressive policy would be to introduce a negative income tax, which our system of tax thresholds attempts. Nevertheless, the current Government has brought more people into the higher rate tax bracket than at any time since the 1940s, according to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, by 2019 (Sandlin, 2019)⁶. Currently, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), the Government's own financial adviser, estimates that this will be, officially, the case by 2026 (Timmins, 2022)⁷.

6 Sandlin, H (2019) Taxes at highest sustained level since 1940s, says IFS | Accountancy Today. 14 November, 2019. [Last accessed: 1 July, 2022].

7 Timmins, B (2022) Two million more people paying higher rate tax - BBC News. 30 June, 2022. [Last accessed 1 July, 2022].

So, national policy is, currently, running counter to the principles of basic income. Given this policy backdrop and the current shocks to household income, it is hard to see that UBI, or anything like it, can be seen as a replacement for the, admittedly, shameful requirement for extensive networks of foodbanks across the UK. That is the depressing political economy of Britain in 2022. One which seems to consign ever greater numbers of the poorest to a reliance on handouts, rather than the dignity of having a basic income to live on, which they can spend in the ways that they see fit, mostly on food, heating, rent, clothes and fuel.



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