



HOUSE OF COMMONS

## Welsh Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [The benefits system in Wales](#), HC 337

Thursday 16 September 2021

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Members present: Stephen Crabb (Chair); Simon Baynes; Geraint Davies; Ruth Jones; Robin Millar; Rob Roberts; Dr Jamie Wallis; Beth Winter.

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### Witnesses

I: Professor Lisa Scullion, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Salford; Emma Congreve, Knowledge Exchange Fellow at the Fraser of Allander Institute; and Professor Christina Beatty, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University.



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Professor Lisa Scullion, Emma Congreve and Professor Christina Beatty.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning. Welcome to the Welsh Affairs Committee in Committee Room 16 in the House of Commons where we are beginning our inquiry today into the benefits system in Wales. This is the first evidence session that we are holding as part of that inquiry.

We are delighted to be joined this morning by three expert panellists: Professor Lisa Scullion, Professor Christina Beatty and Emma Congreve. If you would like to each introduce yourselves and then we will get going with questions. Professor Scullion first, please.

**Professor Scullion:** Hi, my name is Lisa Scullion and I am professor of social policy at the University of Salford. I have been involved in a number of projects looking at the impact and the effectiveness of welfare conditionality and recently looking at the experiences of benefit claimants, both before and during Covid-19.

**Professor Beatty:** I am Christina Beatty. I am a professor at the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. Much of the focus of my research looks at the long-term dynamics of labour markets in different types of places, in different economic contexts, in older industrial Britain, former coalfields and seaside towns, across all local authorities, and how that interacts with the welfare system and especially in relation to the very uneven impact of welfare reform since 2010.

**Emma Congreve:** Good morning. I am Emma Congreve. I am a knowledge exchange fellow at the Fraser of Allander Institute at the University of Strathclyde. I lead the work there on poverty and inequality, and a lot of my research and knowledge exchange activities are around the workings of the social security system in Scotland.

**Chair:** That is great. Thank you very much. I am going to bring in my colleague Robin Millar in a moment to open up the questions but, just as a reminder to fellow Committee members, and to our guests this morning, if we could keep questions and answers as concise as possible that will enable us to get through all of the material that we want to.

Q2 **Robin Millar:** Good morning. Thanks to the panel for your time. Could I address a couple of introductory questions to Professor Beatty, please? I have a personal interest in poverty, welfare and the benefit system part of that, so I am quite interested in your work and this description of the local and regional impact of welfare reforms. As you suggested, these welfare reforms have an uneven impact across the UK. Could you expand on that, please, and could you offer any distinction you might make between welfare and the benefit system itself so that we are clear on phraseology?

**Professor Beatty:** The work that we have done has looked at the impact of all the welfare reforms introduced since 2010 onwards, so both the coalition Government and the post-2015 Government, primarily affecting working-age benefits for those in work and out of work, so it includes the



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tax credit system and the legacy benefits system as well as universal credit and what that means.

We take all of the Budget assessments and all of the impact assessments and those sorts of things, and, when you take together all of those financial cuts within the system since then, the system as a whole in Britain is £25 billion a year less than there would have been if the system had continued on its previous path. Even though it is a national policy, it has a very uneven impact in a local area depending on the concentrations of benefit claimants that you have, low wages in your area, in-work benefits, top-ups and what your labour market context is.

In Wales that means the intensity of the hit is higher than it is in some of the other regions. In the north-west and the north-east the hit is higher but Wales is third out of all of the regions, and it equates to just over £1.3 billion a year less than there would have been if the reforms had not taken place. That is money that affects the individuals, so they all have less money, but it also affects the local economies. It is money that primarily would have been spent in those local areas. It affects the communities and the areas as well as it does the individuals themselves.

**Q3 Robin Millar:** Can I check two points with you? You talked straightaway about cuts. I was careful to differentiate between welfare reform and benefits. Again, could I ask you to distinguish between welfare reform and benefits, because my understanding is that benefits is just part of a system of welfare and I think it would be unfair to say that welfare, as a whole, has been cut because it includes more than finance.

**Professor Beatty:** Primarily in and around the areas that I am looking at, it is to do with all of the changes towards the working-age benefit system, how that supports people in low-income families who are either in work or out of work and the types of benefits that they might receive from mainstream DWP or HMRC, so the likes of things like universal credit, jobseeker's allowance, employment and support allowance, housing benefit, and those elements of the welfare reform package that went through.

My work doesn't look at some of the wider issues at all. Pensioners are outside the scope because primarily they have been protected throughout the welfare reform. I don't take into account things like wider social or welfare elements that might be in place to do with support that might be available locally through local authority funding, which has also had downward pressure on it. It is very much in and around those reforms that were brought in as part of the legacy system, towards universal credit, towards working-age people and how you support those in low-income families. It is the benefit system inside that part of the welfare system or social security system as would—

**Q4 Robin Millar:** Thank you. I appreciate that because I am happy to have a debate around very clearly defined things. On that point, to be clear, you are talking about financial inputs from Government rather than the throughputs, the recipients of individuals or even the outcomes and what



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the consequences of that funding have been?

**Professor Beatty:** Indeed. In effect, I am an economic geographer. What I do is take all the Budget statements, all of the policy announcements and all of the DWP statistics. Primarily the impact assessments tend to focus on things at a national level—kind of very aspatial. They might give you an average of the amount per type of household but they don't tell you what that means for areas.

I have done an exercise along with my colleague, Professor Steve Fothergill, where we have taken all of the Government statistics and tried to relate that to the numbers of either in-work or out-of-work benefit claimants in particular areas and seeing what that means in terms of the financial loss that they have in theory relative to what they would have had—which is how the Budget does it—if the changes or the reforms had not taken place that have restricted entitlement and eligibility of the amounts. It is very focused around that aspect of it.

Q5 **Robin Millar:** Just to be clear about the geographical aspect of this, what you are describing is a geographical aggregation of demographics, so that within a certain geographical area these demographics result in this total sum of benefit or a reduction in benefits. Thank you for that.

Looking a little bit at the pandemic, we have obviously seen a massive increase of inputs into the benefit system but, from your perspective, how has the pandemic affected the benefit system overall?

**Professor Beatty:** In terms of the numbers of universal credit claimants, there has been a near doubling of the number of people who now rely on universal credit relative to before the pandemic. Obviously, the social security element of it does not take account of the additional investment that will have been made through the job retention scheme in trying to support people in the replacement of their livelihoods.

I think in Wales there are now about 250,000 claimants of universal credit. That is not quite a doubling but a near doubling of what it would have been—

Q6 **Robin Millar:** Have you spotted any regional variation between, for example, areas where there are claimants in, let's say, Wales—we are talking about Wales—and other parts of the country? You mentioned the north-east. Has there been a differential in the impact of the pandemic or have you just seen a universal uplift across the whole of the United Kingdom?

**Professor Beatty:** For some elements of it, it is a universal uplift but there are variations in terms of the job retention scheme take-up. It is probably more notable within various sectors of the economy, what types of jobs you have and where those concentrations of jobs might be. In some elements there will be parts of the hospitality or art sector or various sectors that in London will have been hit very hard but might not have the same jobs concentration in other parts of the country.



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We did a study of the impact of Covid across industrial areas. What that showed was that, in some circumstances, it wiped out the progress that had taken place in some of these areas in the 10 years prior to the pandemic. They were lagging behind before and they are lagging behind now, so it has just put them backwards to where they were previous to several years of growth prior to that.

**Q7** **Rob Roberts:** I appreciate the answers that have gone already and thank the witnesses for their time.

I will ask a broad question about how, if at all, the challenges faced in the benefits system—in Wales specifically—differ from those throughout the UK. I will cover that broad theme and ask very specific questions to each one of the witnesses. I would like to start with Ms Congreve. Looking at the work that you have done in the past on people with low incomes specifically, under the last 20 years of devolution, previously the average wage was about the same in Wales as it was in Scotland, but now, 20 years later, Wales has fallen behind Scotland and our average income is about 15% lower. I am interested to know what your opinion is as to the challenges that that would bring as it relates to average earnings.

**Emma Congreve:** Obviously the system in Scotland is quite different from England and Wales, in terms of what has been devolved, but the majority of the means-tested system, payments to low-income families, many elements of that remain reserved to Westminster, so we are still within the kind of broad package of universal credit, albeit there are still some differences around the edges.

Scotland as a region is obviously quite a diverse region. It is difficult to take the whole country together when you have very different economies in the central belt and then the north and south of Scotland. It just works very differently. It can be quite difficult to take the country as a whole but statistics tend to do that when you look at economic statistics in particular.

There are regions, as in parts of Scotland, that will be very similar to many parts of Wales in the challenges they face and the issues they face around low income and average earnings. I think the central belt pushes up average earnings to a large extent. Some of those industries that are there are within financing and those areas which have higher earnings all together. It is very difficult in all cases to take these aggregates of very large parts of the UK and compare them.

I am not sure I am totally answering your question here but, of course, with any system where social security is there to top up those low incomes, that is the critical part of the system that operates across the whole of the UK and, as I say, universal credit still makes that function in Scotland.

**Q8** **Rob Roberts:** Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Professor Scullion, I know you have previously done some work on military veterans with your studies. We have a number of military communities dotted around various parts of Wales, so would you be able to answer the broader question of the challenges facing the benefits system in Wales as it might specifically relate to those military communities?



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**Professor Scullion:** To clarify, my research has not focused specifically on Wales and a lot of the work I have done has been within England or UK-wide studies. Also, to clarify in terms of the methodology, my research is qualitative in nature, so it involves in-depth interviewing with people rather than large-scale surveys, although I am leading a study that has a survey element, which I can talk about, around the Covid experience.

In terms of the challenges, in the veteran cohorts that I have spoken to there are a range of different issues, if you take the benefit processes step by step. In terms of initially understanding eligibility, it is difficult for people. It is not something that is routinely given to them when they leave service. Information on the benefit system is often focused on employment trajectories or health issues, not necessarily your entitlements to the benefit system, so understanding eligibility is key.

Navigating the incredibly complex benefits system, I think we would all agree it is a very complex system. Even though universal credit is meant to simplify the system, it is still incredibly complex for people, so it is about understanding that. Again, when you have spent significant time within the armed forces you may not understand these systems in the same way that others within the civilian population might understand them.

For us, in our research we found some significant issues around benefits assessment processes. These reiterate acknowledged issues around how mental health, for example, is being addressed within benefits assessment processes: how do assessors take account of episodic natures of mental health? Do they understand service-attributed health conditions and can they assess that appropriately within these assessments?

We found, for example, people being assessed as fit for work and then having to appeal against that decision. Some of the veterans we worked with subsequently, once they were within the system and depending on the conditionality that was applied to them, experienced difficulties with conditionality and with meeting conditionality. There were also broader issues around experiences of the interactions both with DWP staff and with benefits assessors, how those interactions took place and could retraumatise those who had service-related mental health issues.

There are lots of issues. It is very complex. I am trying to summarise briefly quite a large study, but these are some of the main issues for us around understanding eligibility, making sure they have the information but, also, the training of DWP staff and benefits assessors to be able to understand the complex needs of some of the people that they are interacting with. This does not just apply to veterans. I would say this applies to all people who are within the benefits system. Appropriate training seems to be key to make sure that you are not retraumatising people, and also that you are offering personalised support.

Q9 **Rob Roberts:** That is fabulous. Not wanting to steal anyone else's thunder—I am pretty sure that one of my Committee colleagues is going to come back to experiences and how staff should be trained later on—but I appreciate that answer.



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My final question in this part is to Professor Beatty about how specifically the challenges in the benefits system in Wales differ from elsewhere. How do you feel successive UK Governments have effectively dealt with the implications for social security policy in terms of regional socioeconomic differences? That is particularly relevant in my constituency. I have about 30% more over-65s than the national average. It is quite a salient issue in north-east Wales.

**Professor Beatty:** I suppose in some senses an element of the social security system does not take account of place and there are differences in the socioeconomic profiles and strengths of labour markets in areas, which reflects back on the earlier questions that we were answering in the previous bit. That is in some senses those differences between your strength of jobs in your area and labour market demand, and those sorts of things, which lead through to higher wages or not, which might be part of those issues that you were talking about.

The wages element makes the difference between some parts of the country where historically they have had had for quite a while now weaker labour market activity in terms of the amount of jobs, the types of jobs and the level of pay that is available. That has a disproportionate effect against some areas of the country.

I suppose, in some sense, talking about Wales as a whole hides that, just like parts of the north-east, parts of the north-west, parts of Wales between the valleys have a much harder hill to climb to some of those elements. The social security system, in terms of the level of support that it provides in those areas, if you have higher numbers of people who are on certain types of benefits—and including those who are on long-term sickness benefits especially in and around the Welsh valleys—the opportunities to get out of the situation are less and the level of support they might be getting is being pushed downwards, and so in some sense it just leads to a greater disparity between the wealthy parts of the country, and that is the whole of GB as well as Wales.

Any country that has a disproportionate amount of local authorities might have particular economic problems. That will lead to a bigger issue in and around the welfare system and how that supports them. I think it is important to realise that that is to do with people who are in work as well as those who are out of work, that these areas are the same areas that tend to have low wages as well as having higher numbers of people on working-age, out-of-work benefits, and that we need to think wider than just the traditional unemployment bit. It is a wider thing than that and that includes those people who are on long-term sickness benefits.

**Rob Roberts:** Thank you, professor, for those very comprehensive answers. Chair.

Q10 **Chair:** Thank you, Rob. I am going to bring in Ruth Jones in a minute but if I could just follow up on your answer just then, Professor Beatty, because you were saying some very interesting things. The UK Government talk a lot about levelling up. It is one of their broad themes and narratives. They



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talk a lot about improving labour markets in different parts of the country, improving the productivity of different regions that have lagged behind, and want to create a more equitable and more equal economy. Do you think there is a role for the benefits system when we talk about levelling up? Do you think that the benefits system and welfare policy should be part of the vocabulary of levelling up, or do you see them as distinct policy areas?

**Professor Beatty:** I think a bit of both. If Government policy was more joined up across the demand side of things—economic investment and jobs—as well as the support side of things and helping people on low incomes, it would work much better.

Levelling up is a very important agenda for parts of older industrial Britain, seaside towns, lots of marginalised communities of people as well as places, and so in some sense the benefits system would work better with economic stimulation and jobs and labour market policy and investment through levelling up in particular types of places.

Whether or not that means that you need an individualised approach—which becomes far more difficult to operationalise at a local level, how you operate the mainstream benefits, as Scotland has been able to do, certain ones around the edges to do with children and the caring system—with those main DWP benefits it is far more difficult to work at a local level.

I suppose, in some sense, it tends to be very much about supply side initiatives. It is all about employability or how you help these people into jobs. Marrying that up with how you invest in an area to create job opportunities that are there for people to go into and how you join up the supply side and demand side would, I think, work far more effectively, and you need to bring employers into that as well as the Government and the social security system and invest well.

Q11 **Chair:** Thank you very much. That is very helpful. Do Professor Scullion or Ms Congreve want to add to that?

**Emma Congreve:** Just one comment to say that, while the levelling-up agenda is very important and there are particular areas, yes, that need scrutiny and support, not every person who lives in a disadvantaged circumstance will live in a disadvantaged area. There are pockets in all parts of the country, so we need to be very mindful that the system needs to be there for everyone wherever they live and provide that—as I often say—safety net. There is perhaps a bit of a conflict there between thinking about a regional approach versus a person-centred approach that gives support wherever it is needed.

Q12 **Chair:** To follow up on that, would you agree that that kind of system that you talk about being there for everyone, wherever they are, lends itself more to being centralised and very uniformly run from a centralised Government rather than with more variation along devolved lines?

**Emma Congreve:** Not necessarily. I think to some extent devolution remains centralised within the national Government in Scotland. I think



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that is consistent with the principle that, whichever part of the country that makes the rules that you live under, everyone can access that support regardless of where they live.

There is a role for local authorities in terms of crisis payments so that they can respond to local circumstances. I think there is a role in terms of responsiveness in particular areas, but not all people will necessarily know how to reach out to those services. It might be in certain areas that there is more outreach support available if you are in an area where there are no levels of high deprivation, for example. There may be more proactive efforts going on there, but then you have a person living in the middle of an affluent area who is struggling and not getting that support or that encouragement to reach out for crisis support. It is important that there is an underpinning level of support for them. It is not about devolution. That is more in response to your question about levelling up or targeting in specific parts of the country.

**Q13 Ruth Jones:** Thank you to the panellists for your time this morning. I am going to ask questions of Professor Scullion and Professor Beatty, but I want to go back to pre-pandemic levels. Obviously we know that the Government have done a lot of input since the pandemic started. Looking back to pre-pandemic levels, I would ask both of you: what is your assessment of the adequacy of the benefits system and the benefits levels before we had Covid? I will start with Professor Scullion.

**Professor Scullion:** Yes, sure. I am leading a study at the moment working with colleagues who have been looking at the benefits system during Covid and I have done work prior to Covid. I think the short answer is that the benefits system was not adequate pre-Covid. Routinely people told us of the severe financial difficulties they had in managing on the money and the choices you have to make on a day-to-day basis on what you spend that money on: rent, food, heating. Those kinds of heat or eat debates came through in a lot of research that I have been involved in and other academic research that is there.

I can talk a little bit about the work we have then gone on to do during Covid. We have obviously done a survey, of 6,000 new and existing claimants, as part of our welfare and social distance project. Around half of those talked about severe financial difficulties, being unable to afford their bills, being unable to eat fresh food and vegetables per day. Food insecurity featured in that study, so one in five existing claimants, one in six new claimants talked about skipping meals in the previous two weeks when we had done that survey.

One of the issues in that survey as well is that legacy benefit claimants or legacy ESA and JSA claimants, so those that have not received the £20 uplift in the basic rate, recorded the highest levels of financial insecurity. This is what we found within the survey.

Obviously the issue of the financial uplift has been something that has been widely debated. The study has shown that those people who are not receiving that are experiencing greater financial difficulty. However, I



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would say that even with the uplift people were still describing struggling on a day-to-day basis, so there is a longer-term issue of looking at the adequacy of the benefits system. So, I guess the short answer is yes, pre-Covid it was inadequate. The uplift seems to have helped people but people were still struggling in some ways even with that money that was coming.

Q14 **Ruth Jones:** Thank you. Professor Beatty, obviously we are looking back to pre-pandemic because the fact that the £20 uplift is coming to an end is being well trailed. In terms of your assessment of pre and post-Covid, how adequate do you think the system is?

**Professor Beatty:** I think pre-pandemic there were serious issues in terms of how much the level of basic safety net had been pushed downwards was to do with the entirety of the reforms—or we take them as a whole, and that includes the housing benefit system and local housing allowance, as well as things like universal credit, the freezing of benefits and reducing the relative amount relative to the cost of living over time. They lost about 6% of their value relative to the cost of living over that period.

I suppose it is that entirety of how it has been chipped away—all elements of it, even in terms of freezing the child benefit for everyone. It impacts on low-income households as well. The housing benefit system, the benefit cap, I think that is what is always complex about this. The complexity of the different types of households as well as the different types of areas you might live in means that these impacts have differential impacts across different types of people.

I think the Resolution Foundation showed that just the changes to the universal credit system—and I think Lisa's point about a legacy benefit system is really important, because all of those changes have been inherited by the universal credit system. There are also still a large number of people in the legacy benefit system who have not benefited from some of the changes post-pandemic.

The Resolution Foundation showed that for a lone parent family with children and who were in a minimum wage job, the changes to the system meant that they were £2,600 a year worse off than they would have been if the changes had not happened. That is a substantial downward pressure on your household income. That includes people who are in work as well as out of work and, in effect, doing all the things that they should be or are encouraged to do and taking all the opportunities they can to access work.

The impact on families with children has been particularly hard. I think the pre-pandemic level of subsistence, because it has chipped away at your housing support, your council tax support, all of this with a downward pressure, made it inadequate for people with families with children, and that includes families who are on low-income wages as well as those who are in work.

There are issues in and around the taper, I think, to do with how much you are able to keep after you have paid your tax, national insurance and the



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rest. I think it works out at around about 25p in the pound. How do you offset that? Do you try to take on more hours and improve your situation? Whereas, if you think you are only getting 25% more for every hour extra worked, and you may pay your bus fare to and from work, which might be £2 each way, that is eight hours extra work just to pay your bus fare. I think it had been pushed to a level where it wasn't sufficient, especially for the most vulnerable, especially for families and children, and especially for those who are unable to work through long-term ill health and sickness.

The £20 uplift is worth about £5 billion a year extra in the system but, as I said earlier, there is £25 billion a year less in the system than there was, so that is only offsetting a fifth of it.

**Q15 Ruth Jones:** Thank you. You both made powerful points about the legacy benefits and the effect on children. Thank you for that.

Can I go back to Professor Scullion? You have been quoted as saying that you believe that in the longer term there is a need for a "wider consideration of the adequacy of the benefits system". Why do you believe that and what do you think should be included in the terms of reference of such a consideration?

**Professor Scullion:** In terms of why we recommended that, that came from our first survey that we did at the beginning of the first lockdown when we started that study. The work we are doing is ongoing so, thinking about what is adequate, this is something that I cannot answer. We are still ongoing with that work. In many ways, it is quite difficult for us to answer that from the kinds of interviews that we have done with people.

One of the things I wanted to pick up on is something that Christina has talked about—and she is quite right—particularly with families, around the intersections with the other changes that have gone on within the benefits system. Within our study those people who were subject to the caps, the deductions, the charges, were more likely to experience the severe financial difficulties that we are talking about.

There are issues around how these deductions are made—things like the universal credit advance payment that people take as part of the assessment period for first payment or the five-week wait, as it is often called. This was a pre-pandemic issue and it has continued during Covid. It is part of the design of the system that you have to wait. These are things that we think need to be looked at as part of that wider review but, in terms of the level at which payments should be made, it is difficult for me to say at this stage. It is difficult to say within the studies that we have done. We think that this needs to be looked at.

People are telling us that they have food insecurity. People told us that before and people were telling us about that during, even with the uprating. Certainly, first and foremost we would suggest don't remove that £20 uplift but also, in the longer term, we need to look at the levels at which benefits are paid.



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Another thing I just wanted to mention as well, as Christina said, is around families. Again, those people that have the intersecting reforms were having greater difficulties—people who were subject to the benefit cap, the two-child limit, some of those that were subjected to the bedroom tax. These are the people who told us that they were struggling most in terms of the financial difficulties.

**Q16 Beth Winter:** Thank you all. This is extremely interesting. You have done some valuable research work on this important topic.

Moving on to the impact of Covid, I would like to begin by asking Professor Beatty a question. How effectively do you feel that the Government and the DWP have responded to the pressures on the benefits system during the pandemic? I am trying in particular to tease out a bit more in terms of those regional variations, focusing on Wales.

**Professor Beatty:** In terms of the quick response in and around post-Covid, trying to process those large numbers of people who have been relying on the system, the near doubling of numbers, the DWP and the system, the jobcentre staff have coped well in the circumstances. But what is difficult is the level of support that they are able to give people as we come out of this now and the job retention scheme goes, with work coaches or employment support and those sorts of things, because of the sheer number of people within the system, which will be higher in certain areas than others. So, in Wales again, back to the values, back to old industrial parks or, indeed, rural or seaside towns, they might need a greater level of intensity of support for those claimants in those areas moving forward as the economy comes out of this situation.

The acceptance of the £20 uplift as trying to help people deal with the situation that they are facing, which benefited those who were already in the system, unless you were on a legacy benefit system, was a good move but, once it goes, then I think you are still going to have larger numbers in particular parts of depressed local economies, and so that is going to be a problem for parts of Wales, as it will be in parts of other areas with higher concentrations of benefit claimants.

I will go back to that point about the local housing allowance system again. The first time after lots and lots of research, we did the DWP national evaluation monitoring for the local housing allowance changes for tenants within the private rented sector who rely on Housing Benefit, as it was then—it is now the housing entitlement bit of universal credit. That system, which is pre-pandemic but they temporarily uplifted it back to the 30 percentile of local market rents, which is primarily an acknowledgement that it had fallen so far below that. Originally, it used to be set at 50%. It is making it difficult for people in the private rented sector on low incomes to be able to afford their rents. Like the plan to remove the £20 uplift, that has now been frozen again and it is not keeping up with rent levels.

Interestingly enough, in Wales, I looked up the statistics on the DWP data yesterday, and for two thirds of all claimants through the local housing allowance system on universal credit, it is not covering tenants' rent. In



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England and in Great Britain as a whole, that is a lower figure. It is more like 52% to 55%.

There might be a particular issue in and around Wales and what that means for your housing. It is back to this thing: you cannot just look at one element of the system. It includes your local housing market as well as your labour market, your benefits system, how you can support people towards work and how you can work the demand-side elements with, say, employers, especially in areas where you might have higher levels of people on long-term sickness benefits, to be able to support them and the employers to bring them back into the labour market where it is possible for them—which obviously it will not be for many.

I think the LHA system in Wales needs looking at because there is something going on there and I am not quite sure what it is from the surface data.

**Q17 Beth Winter:** To add to what you say, the Bevan Foundation has done some detailed research and come up with similar findings. We have seen the work that it has been doing.

Can I just ask Professor Scullion, as well, on your comments around the effectiveness of the Government and DWP's response during the pandemic, if you want to add anything?

**Professor Scullion:** Our study has shown that there are very positive views about DWP from a lot of our participants. We acknowledge the efforts that were made. It was an unprecedented number of people. The system isn't really designed, is it, to support that many people applying in such a short period of time? We do have to acknowledge the efforts that the DWP went to, in terms of deploying staff from other areas to do claims processing—and, I believe, from other areas of the civil service to come in and support—to ensure that people could get their applications through as quickly as possible. I do think we have to acknowledge that.

People talked about the positive interactions with staff when they talked to them on the phone, so there were things that worked really well. I guess that, given the fact that it is a digital-by-default system, in many ways you could say, "With the pandemic, that is a positive aspect of trying to get as many people as possible the money that they are entitled to, as quickly as possible". I guess what also happens is that it compounds existing inequality, because you probably have more people who struggle with digital delivery because there are now more people in that system. Those people who have more complex needs struggle the most, as Christina has talked about—people with more complex needs in areas of deprivation—so the digital delivery works for some but not for others.

People still need that face-to-face contact, so in terms of the interactions with work coaches or part of the benefit assessment process, the choice is important to people in terms of how those interactions take place.

Around the crisis response, yes, there were effective measures in place but I think we need to look at what happens now after that. What happens



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when we go back to the kind of business as usual in terms of the payment level, in terms of the reintroduction of conditionality? What is that going to look like? We know that that is happening but what is that going to look like? How is that going to take into account the variations that Christina has been talking about and that you are interested in around regional variations, the labour markets? These are the kinds of issues that have been coming through in the work that we have been doing.

**Q18 Beth Winter:** Thank you. In terms of the temporary changes that the UK Government have introduced, the universal credit uplift is due to be cut imminently despite overwhelming evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Resolution Foundation and the Bevan Foundation in Wales that clearly says the cuts will impact on Wales particularly hard, given the history of the communities there. Do you feel that that uplift should be maintained and even extended further? If so, in which ways? That question is to Lisa but also to anybody else who wants to come in on it.

**Professor Scullion:** The short answer is yes, it should be maintained and we have recommended that it should be maintained but also extended to legacy benefit claimants because, by not doing that, there seems to have been this kind of implicit view that some claimants are more deserving than others of having their benefits increased. That is something that we do not agree with. We think that this narrative of particular groups being more deserving than others is wrong.

The whole narrative about how we are talking about the benefits system, anyway, is an issue for myself and colleagues and the stigma associated with that system. But that is not part of your question. I am sure we can talk about that as well. But yes, in short, keep it but also extend it to all benefit claimants.

**Q19 Beth Winter:** Anybody else?

**Professor Beatty:** I would agree with maintaining it and, indeed, acknowledging the legacy benefit claimants, especially employment and support allowance claimants, and making it a uniform adjustment for everyone. The LHA changes should not be frozen. I think that should have continued also. That is a long-term issue everywhere for private rental sector tenants, particularly in certain housing markets. It can work in odd ways to do with not just high rent areas but sometimes low rent areas, residential segregation and all sorts of things. I think that both of those should be maintained.

For Wales as a whole, it means that there will be £245 million a year less if they remove the uplift—just for Wales. Again, that will have a geography to it and that is not money that people put away for a rainy day. That is money that people use on day-to-day living expenses and is spent in those local communities. It has an impact on the local economy as well as on the individuals. That is large amounts of money that will not be there post.

I echo the point that Lisa made about the deserving and the rhetoric and the language sometimes used, which Emma might cover later, in terms of how you treat benefit claimants. Scotland may be taking a slightly different



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nuance with all of that. Maybe now is an interesting time, because of the job retention scheme and the support that was made available, to rethink how you think about people who need financial support and how they are treated and how they are talked to. I have heard a few Ministers over the pandemic say, “We had to do this,” for people affected “through no fault of their own—because the pandemic was not their fault—as though prior to the pandemic it was their fault and was to do with a choice of not working rather than with their personal circumstances or the labour market conditions. It is pull as well as push. It is not about choice and it is not about, “through no fault of their own because of the pandemic”. If they were out of work pre-pandemic, it was viewed as being their fault. Some of that stuff needs addressing, and that is maybe where Wales and devolution can make a difference in those things with relatively minimal cost implications.

**Beth Winter:** We are coming on later to discuss more fundamental changes to address issues such as stigmatisation of vulnerable and marginalised groups, so we will revisit it later in the discussion.

Q20 **Simon Baynes:** I want to move on to a section on claimant experience. I will start by asking Professor Scullion because I think this is an area of particular concentration for her. I know that she is leading a national research project, Welfare at a (Social) Distance, examining the experience of benefit claimants throughout the pandemic. How would you describe the experience of claimants in accessing the system and receiving support from DWP staff? That is really a general question that encompasses, I suppose, pre-pandemic, and then I will move on to a second question to you, which will be about the experience during the pandemic.

**Professor Scullion:** Pre-pandemic I was part of a study called Welfare Conditionality. It ran from 2013 to 2018. It was a large-scale qualitative longitudinal research project, so I can draw on experience from there but also from the work I have been doing with veterans, which is pre-pandemic and during pandemic.

The short answer is that there is an inconsistency in how people experienced this. Some people have no issues with accessing the benefit system, managing and understanding their eligibility and then navigating through the digital system. Then you have those who struggle more with various aspects of the system—again those with more complex needs, thinking of some of the veterans within my sample where you have significant physical or mental health issues that are still being addressed. People with those more complex needs have found it more difficult interacting with DWP.

I am wondering whether I need to break down different aspects of the system. You have the application process. Some people found that difficult pre-pandemic to get the information that they needed. Some people often rely on support from third-sector organisations and local authorities to help them to understand their eligibility and their entitlement, particularly, again, where there are more complex needs.



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Once people are within the system, it is important to reflect then on the variability of the support that is provided. There is inconsistency in the experiences within jobcentres that people are accessing but also across different areas of the country where we have done the research. The variation in how different work coaches approach working with benefit claimants, the levels of support that are provided, the discretionary powers that they use, these things all seem to vary quite considerably. That is not to say that everyone is having bad experiences. We have lots of examples of people having positive experiences of going through the claims process and then managing their claim and getting support from their work coaches, but it is the inconsistency that is the concern for us. That comes down to some of the work that has come out recently around the level of discretion that work coaches have and how you appropriately train work coaches to make sure that they are equally using the discretionary powers so people do not experience this inconsistency. These are some of the key issues that we had pre-Covid in terms of access.

Obviously, there are issues around benefits assessments. I don't know if you want us to talk about those. Again, there is inconsistency in different areas of the country around how people experience the benefits assessment processes, assessors fully understanding the different health conditions, those who appear to be less well trained from the perspective of the claimants. Again, it is this inconsistency.

Do you want me to then talk about the Covid experience?

Q21 **Simon Baynes:** That is exactly my next question, thank you very much, so please.

**Professor Scullion:** During Covid, again we are acknowledging that it was a very different landscape for the work coaches and for those people who have been brought in as new work coaches to process claims. We have a mixed picture. We have those who were very positive about the experience that they had with DWP. One of the key things for many people who were accessing the benefit system during Covid was often the fact that they really needed to be able to talk to somebody. If you could not access somebody to speak to if you had queries about your claim or where you are in the process of making the claim, that can create a lot of anxiety for people, especially if it is quite technical things they want to talk about, if they are making claims as a couple or if there are issues around what counts when you are looking at who is in your household and the household income and things like that. People often struggled to get hold of people to talk to, but when they did the DWP often was able to respond to those queries or reassure them. It is just being able to speak to somebody.

There were obviously issues during Covid because of the redeployment of staff. Some of the staff probably did not know as much about the technical aspects of the benefit system as someone who has been working within the DWP for a very long time would. Again, I think that it would be wrong to criticise that because that is part of the crisis response.



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A lot of my work looks at conditionality. Some of the things that have come out about the differences between the pandemic interactions and pre-pandemic was around people talking about how the work coaches were ringing them, checking their wellbeing, reassuring them that this is a pandemic and they are not expected to be engaging in the way they were: “We just want to check that you are okay”. That is very different from some of the interactions that were taking place before Covid and lots of people found it really positive and reassuring to have that kind of engagement.

However, what I have seen since in the work that I have done with veterans—because we are obviously tracking them over time—is that some of them are now experiencing the introduction or the reintroduction of conditionality. They talk about the tone of some of the conversations changing. There are some examples of this being quite jarring. The positive engagement—“Are you okay? Are you managing okay?”—has changed to, “Right, we’re going back to normal now. Now we need you to engage with work-related activity. We are going to be checking your journal to see what you have been doing to find work”. For people that can be quite jarring, to go from a positive engagement around wellbeing to one that is based now on compliance with the conditions of the claim.

I think that there is a need for careful consideration about reintroducing conditionality when things go back to business as usual and how you explain it to claimants, particularly if they are new. If they applied during Covid and have never experienced the pre-Covid conditionality and expectations, it needs explaining to them fully that now this is going to change and to be done in such a way that it is not going to create anxiety for people.

**Q22 Simon Baynes:** Thank you very much for that. I would certainly—and I am sure all my colleagues here would agree—like to put on record how impressed I was with the way in which all the staff at the DWP looked after constituents in my constituency of Clwyd South, and I am sure elsewhere in Wales and the rest of the UK. They did a remarkable job and I had relatively few cases to take up on their behalf, which seemed to me, given the depths of the pandemic, to reflect extremely well upon the staff within DWP. I just want to put that on record.

Can I move on and address this question to Professor Beatty? To what extent do people with disabilities have a different experience of the benefit system? In what ways could any difference in treatment be addressed? Professor Scullion, if you want to add anything to Professor Beatty’s comments, please feel free to do so at the end of her answer.

**Professor Beatty:** I suppose there are two key elements in and around DLA and PIP but also employment and support allowance, where there still remain large numbers of people reliant on additional support through the system. Probably as there has been more job activation in and around the employment and support allowance claimants, or, as you know, on universal credit with limited capability to work or work-related activity, some of it is towards supporting people to get closer to the labour market. I don’t think that it fully recognises the amount or the intensity or the



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length of time that some people might need support, so it is still relatively light touch and it still tends to treat claims, especially within the ESA system or universal credit, as though they are exactly the same as an unemployed person, whereas the move towards individualised support and personalised practical support for claimants, which is a good one, maybe does not take account of the additional barriers that these people face in even making a move towards the labour market rather than an immediate job outcome if they are in the work-related activity group.

I think that there needs to be a bit of a shift in the mindset of some of the policies for that group to really understand that it is a long-term issue that successive Governments, whoever they are, have not been able to support people well enough. Some of it is a demand-side issue in terms of jobs. Some of it is in and around employers and working with those, too, to give people opportunities. I think that there needs to be something done specifically about ESA claimants or universal credit claimants with long-term sickness issues that supports them better and gives them a better experience in terms of the amount or type of support that they get.

Some of the initiatives like the small employer offer were very good, but I do not think that is running anymore. Some local initiatives tend to be better at challenging some of those things and supportive, so health-led employment trials that went on in Sheffield City region and elsewhere, where they worked with claimants over a long period of time to support them on a journey and recognised their individual multiple health issues, with mental health as well as physical health, and how you might work with employers as well as the individuals and the support that they receive.

It is quite a challenging group and I don't think that over the last 20 years they have been given enough help to improve their situation or recognition that for many of them work is not an option, given their health condition.

**Q23 Simon Baynes:** Thank you. I am very conscious of time; we have several more questions. Professor Scullion, is there anything you wanted to add to that very briefly before I go on to my next and final question?

**Professor Scullion:** It is just to support what Christina said about personalised support. Sometimes for those who are in the ESA support group, they reflected on the irony of it being called the support group because when you are in the support group there is no support. You are kind of left alone without support. Sometimes there is a fear of engaging with support and finding that you are removed from that group, where there is no work-related expectation, and moved into a group where there will be more work-related expectations. It can be a bit counterproductive. People in the support group will want to engage in things that could help them in the future, but they could be fearful to do so because they do not want to then be recategorised into one of the conditionality groups.

**Q24 Simon Baynes:** Thank you very much. My final question is to Ms Congreve. Earlier on you touched on the situation in Scotland. Has Social Security Scotland's charter made a tangible difference to claimants' experience of the benefit system in Scotland?



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**Emma Congreve:** The charter was co-produced with people with lived experience of the benefit system, particularly in relation to those on the ill health and disability benefits, which are transferred to Scotland. It does go to great pains to make that user experience at the centre of it. There are many things around how they expect the system to treat them, with “dignity” and “respect” being the key words that we often hear.

With respect to how it is working in practice, there is monitoring of it over time to see if it is living up to what it needs to. I would say that because we have not yet fully transferred some of the big benefits—the big adult and child disability and the carer benefits are still in the process of being moved over into Social Security Scotland—it is probably a little bit too soon to tell how well it will live up to that. A lot of the benefits that are now operational in Scotland through Social Security Scotland are some of the relatively small ones.

The general feeling appears to be that the principles are right and so far, so good, but it will be a few years before we see those big cohorts transferred into the Social Security Scotland system and where we see things like assessments and issues around the operationalisation of the system come out.

Q25 **Chair:** I am going to bring in Geraint Davies in a moment, but can I follow up with Professor Scullion on her remarks regarding conditionality? You contrasted the experience of claimants during the pandemic with perhaps how it was before the pandemic, and you made some comments about not wanting to go back to the pre-pandemic regime, although I think you acknowledged that there were differences in how different staff dealt with claimants. Can I press you a bit further? Are you opposed to sanctions within the system?

**Professor Scullion:** Yes, I am opposed to sanctions. I think that sanctions cause harm. Removing money is not going to help someone to move closer to paid employment; it is going to put barriers in people’s way to doing so.

As I say, in the study that I was involved in a number of years ago on welfare conditionality, for five years we were exploring the experiences of claimants who were subject to varying degrees of conditionality. One of the main messages from that study was that, overall, conditionality was ineffective at moving people closer to the labour market in any meaningful and sustainable way. It often had very counterproductive impacts. Conditionality is about moving people towards paid work and getting people to engage in paid work, and by having this sanctions-backed compliance system, what happens is compliance and avoiding that punishment element sometimes becomes the key focus. That takes people away from some of the meaningful activities. You get into a situation of people applying for jobs that they may never have any chance of getting because they have to do so many hours of work search activity.

Q26 **Chair:** That is a really helpful answer, thank you. Every work coach that I have spoken to will talk about clients who are particularly difficult, who do not want to necessarily be within the system, do not respond well to the



encouragement and directions of work coach staff. If you give up sanctions as an ultimate tool, what are you left with? For those most difficult clients within the system, what do you use in the absence of sanctions?

**Professor Scullion:** The first thing is how many of those people we are talking about, because it feels like a sledgehammer to crack a nut, to use that analogy. We are talking about a very small number of people but we are creating a system that punishes a large proportion of people because a small proportion of people do not want to engage in the way that they deem people should engage. The proportionality of it seems to be an issue to me.

For those people who do not want to engage, has the support that has been provided to them been personalised? Has it taken into consideration all the various issues that are going on and the circumstances that they have? At the moment, it feels like we still need to redress the balance between the focus on the more punitive side and looking, as Christina and I said before, at the quality of the personalised support that is provided. If more was done around the support and quality employment support or linking people with the relevant agencies that they need to be linked to, to provide the health support and things, I think that would address a lot of the barriers that some people have. If we emphasise that more, redress the balance, then this would be a more positive step.

Q27 **Chair:** Okay, thank you. I have one more question before I bring in Geraint, again about the different way of engaging with clients during the pandemic compared with previously. One of the issues that the National Audit Office has highlighted has been the sharp increase in the estimates of fraud and error within universal credit during the pandemic. Talking to the National Audit Office, it put it directly down to absence of face to face discussions and a relaxation of some basic controls. Would you agree with that? If you do not want to see us going back to some of the pre-pandemic ways of doing things, how do you address the fraud and error issue? There is a lot of money being lost within the system at the moment.

**Professor Scullion:** I would like to think that they will be returning to some face to face interactions anyway within the system because a lot of the benefit claimants that we are working with want to have that choice over their interactions and return to that face to face support anyway. Some like the remote support, some don't.

I am not sure I can comment on the fraud and error. It is not an area that I research. Again, I guess it is about the proportion. Is it proportionate to focus on fraud and error? We are talking again about how we talk about benefit claimants. We often focus on fraud and error in relation to the benefit system but not fraud in relation to other systems. I do not think that people have talked about whether there was any fraud and error in relation to the furlough scheme and things like that. Again, we are talking about particular groups of people who seem to be vilified and that is how the debate goes around those groups of people. I guess it is just thinking about how we address that.



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**Chair:** Just for clarity, “fraud and error” is an official phrase and it may well be that a lot of it is down to error rather than deliberate fraud. The NAO does make that point. It also does pick up on the point about fraud and error within furlough, given that even if you are talking about a very small percentage, a very small percentage of a huge number is a lot of money. Anyway, that is a slightly side topic. Geraint Davies, over to you.

- Q28 **Geraint Davies:** Professor Beatty, you mentioned that there had been a reduction in overall benefits by something like £25 billion, and the universal credit cuts are £5 billion extra. In Wales I think that £1.3 billion was cut, and then there is an extra £245 million. Would you accept that, given that Wales has got to now 70% UK gross value added, and wages are basically a lot lower in Wales, that proportionate cut in benefits hits the local economy much harder? Secondly, do you have any numbers for how much more will be hit on top of that by the national insurance changes for lower-paid incomes that we are hearing about?

**Professor Beatty:** I will start at the end of that. I don’t have any figures to hand specifically on the increase in national insurance, but there was something this week from the IFS and I think Resolution Foundation—I think it was in response to Thérèse Coffey’s comments about if people worked an extra couple of hours they would offset the £20—explaining the marginal rates and all of that sort of stuff. You would have to work about nine or 10 hours rather than two hours to be able to offset.

- Q29 **Geraint Davies:** I guess my general point is that if we have a proportionate cut in Wales and we have more people on benefits, on lower wages—

**Professor Beatty:** Yes, it will impact on you hard.

**Geraint Davies:** —and then we do the same thing with national insurance, we will be hit again and it does not create the conditions for economic recovery but it does create the conditions for mass poverty. Is that something you would share?

**Professor Beatty:** That is correct. Areas with higher proportions of benefit claimants and low wages are disproportionately affected. In Wales, we have particular concentrations in parts of Wales and they will be harder hit by the removal of the £20 because you will have a higher number in certain areas of Wales, not all Wales.

On the labour market conditions, like you say, with GVA or productivity and those sorts of things, and trying to address those through the levelling-up agenda in terms of jobs growth, Wales will be disproportionately affected in certain parts of Wales because of all of those issues. It relates back to the numbers and types of benefit claimants you have in particular areas.

- Q30 **Geraint Davies:** Rob Roberts mentioned the fact that over the last 20 years there has been a significant change in Scotland as opposed to Wales; we are 15% less and, therefore, more vulnerable to these cuts. Would you agree with me that one of the explanations for that is surely the much more generous Barnett settlement that Scotland has than Wales? Indeed,



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this Committee has recently recommended that we get our 5% share—our fair share—of HS2, in the same way as Scotland does. Do you agree that the more generous Barnett settlement for Scotland accounts for some of the reason that it has a stronger economy and is more robust in terms of these savage cuts to benefits?

**Professor Beatty:** That might be the case. I am not sure I am an expert to be able to confirm that with hard evidence, but I do think that in areas of the economy, including in Scotland and in places where there is a stronger labour market in parts, they will have done better in terms of the diversity of parts of the economy, as Emma said earlier, in and around Edinburgh and parts of the finance sector, which will have improved its GVA and elements like that. I am sure that public investment via the Barnett formula or what local authorities get or how you decide to use your block grant to support parts of your economy or disadvantaged communities or people will have a knock-on effect on your economic growth and talent. If there is more investment in Wales, in places and people and the system as a whole, then I would assume you would do better in terms of longer-term economic growth and how well you did over time. If you are having less than them, then I would assume that would have a knock-on effect on your local economy.

Q31 **Geraint Davies:** In general, therefore, in terms of the levelling-up agenda, there is a case for those who are weaker, who are being hit harder by benefit cuts, to have more economics of investment, ignoring the Barnett thing, just in general?

**Professor Beatty:** Yes, and I think it needs to be a recognition not just of the cuts to local authorities and the benefit system over the last 10 years, but it goes back far longer than that in loss of jobs, deindustrialisation and weaker elements of the economy in certain parts of Wales that really need a long-term investment programme that is substantially about improving job prospects so that you keep some of your younger people, so that you keep some of the better educated people and you grow your GVA and your jobs and productivity. It does require long-term investment and the worry I have about the levelling-up agenda is that it seems very piecemeal at the moment and small scale and it needs more—

Q32 **Geraint Davies:** More strategic investment in skills and education and this sort of thing through the Welsh Government perhaps?

**Professor Beatty:** Yes, but not just supply side stuff, it has to be demand-side stuff as well, so investment in the manufacturing industry we should still have a big part of. Investment in jobs and incentivising employers to create jobs in particular areas is a good move, I would say, or a move towards green jobs. There are all sorts of ways you can invest, which are not just to do with supply side initiatives. You can train every young person but if there isn't a job for them to go to, it is not going to end in the outcome that everybody wants.

Q33 **Geraint Davies:** A major investment in the rail infrastructure or something like that, yes.



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Can I ask Emma Congreve a similar question? I know that you are an expert in Scotland. Is there any reason to believe, as I have suggested, that the growth in the economy in Scotland and the average wages drifting higher than Wales is linked to a more generous Barnett settlement, as far as you are aware?

**Emma Congreve:** I am not aware of any specific research that looks at Barnett and economic growth. There are elements that make sense within that question. Generally, if you put more money into government spending, then that is part of the economy so there is a potential route through there. The key thing is where that money is spent by the Government in terms of whether it leads to particular elements of economic growth and wage growth.

As to some of the elements that may have been prioritised in Scotland, two things come to mind: free prescriptions and free tuition fees. For people on lower incomes they were either already largely protected or they were getting substantial grants, if we are talking about tuition fees, and maybe the benefit has gone to higher-income families. How that then all spills over into the economy is the question.

I think that it is a valid point about investment, but I am not sure that the Barnett formula is the be-all and end-all in that question about whether investment has been higher and then that linking to higher wages in Scotland, which I think was your specific question.

Q34

**Geraint Davies:** Professor Scullion, moving on, we have just heard of the benefits for normal people who are struggling of having, for instance, free prescriptions and, indeed, free bus fares. There is a big issue about food, isn't there? Across the UK I think that we have 7 million people in food insecurity. Tell me about your experience of people coming forward and saying they do not have enough food and whether you have any particular suggestions. I would like a very brief answer from the others as well. Is there any way that through the system we could ensure that at least people have enough food to eat each day, in particular with children?

**Professor Scullion:** We are doing a food insecurity report, which we will be able to share with the Committee in a couple of weeks. The previous survey that I referred to, though, did show that food insecurity was one of those key indicators when people talked about financial strain. We asked about being able to eat fresh fruit and vegetables daily. Around half of the people we talked to were unable to in the survey that we did. We also asked about whether people had skipped meals in the previous two weeks on the date that they did the survey, and one in five existing claimants and one in six of the new claimants who claimed during Covid had skipped a meal in the previous two weeks at the point that they had done their survey. It does seem to be, as I mentioned previously, one of those issues that was there pre-pandemic and continues for some households in the choices they make in relation to the household budget.

As to how to address that, again I would go back to my previous comments about the adequacy of the system. The system is obviously not adequate



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if people have to make these choices around whether they will eat or not. Then we need to look at the adequacy of the payments that people are receiving.

- Q35 **Geraint Davies:** Would you agree, then, that if you are struggling to buy enough food, a £20 a week cut—£1,000 a year—is a lot of money? I assume that you are not suggesting or would not suggest any form of food rationing, by the way. Obviously, if we have cases where people literally do not have enough money, I suppose the simplest thing to do is to give them a bit more. Is that basically your view?

**Professor Scullion:** Yes, my view is that this is about people having enough money to buy the food that they need to buy for their family. We should not be looking at rationing. In my view, we should not be looking at vouchers. People should have the cash to make the choices around the food that they eat and they buy for their families as well. We should not be introducing stigmatising measures, where benefit claimants have a separate way of claiming food-related support. They should have the same choice that other people have in terms of the food they buy and the food they eat.

- Q36 **Geraint Davies:** Professor Beatty, do you have any suggestions about food insecurity or any silver bullets for the system other than to make it a bit more generous and reverse some of the cuts?

**Professor Beatty:** In terms of the basic level of the safety net, I think that it is probably too low. I did a study of low income women workers and their use of food banks. In some senses, the food banks have just ended up being the last emergency security net, which is stepping into the breach because the rest of the system is not and the support that local authorities could give was not enough.

The interesting thing in and around some of that work that we did with food banks, schools and children in poverty was around the employment conditions. Part of the issue was the fluctuations in their wages over time, because they were doing shifts in precarious work and those types of things, and that was affecting their ability to have a stable income stream. Universal credit was adding to that insecurity. They would have a point in time when they would have some work, then maybe less work, and they had no savings. They had no ability to have any financial cushion within the household to offset that. They were superb at budgeting but it was just that they did not have enough stable income over time. Maybe the working tax credit system used to do that in a more stable way, whereas with universal credit you are not quite sure from one month to the next how much you will get. That was part of the issue. It was not just levels of benefit; it was security and stability of income.

- Q37 **Geraint Davies:** Finally, because I am overstretching my time, Professor Beatty, if there was a devolution of social security systems and a more generous system provided in Wales, for instance—obviously, it is about different priorities—would that cause any problems with borders and migration, in your view, or is that something that could be managed?



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**Professor Beatty:** I think that it is very difficult to devolve some of the main benefits beyond the national level in terms of universal credit or issues in and around parity. As Lisa said, the basic level of security should be there for everyone. In terms of devolution and what you might be able to do at a local level, it is like how Scotland or Northern Ireland at points are doing it. It is how you can do localised interventions that offset or mitigate some of the wider elements. Wales, for example, did not pass on the 10% cut to the council tax benefit system; neither did Scotland. You protected your residents on just that one element but it is still a help. It is how you do things within the local area that might concentrate on particular areas of need and particular groups in need, especially the most vulnerable. It is probably about offsetting some of the wider stuff. To unpick yourself from DWP and HMRC and the UC system, 10 years down the line—it was meant to be fully integrated by 2013—we are still not there. Unless you have a bottomless pit of money I am not sure that that is an option to you.

**Chair:** One thing that there isn't is a bottomless pit of money.

Q38 **Rob Roberts:** I am going to ask the same question to all of you, but there are two parts to it. The first part is: very broadly, what do you think are the key lessons that the pandemic has taught us about welfare policy generally? Secondly—this could be the more interesting part—if you could make one overarching recommendation about how the benefit system could be improved, what would that one major thing be? As we have our windows open here and we can hear someone playing the bagpipes on Westminster Bridge, we will start with Ms Congreve, please.

**Emma Congreve:** Apologies for that. On your first question about what the pandemic has taught us, it is the importance of the flexibility of systems. I agree with Professor Scullion, who has talked about how well universal credit coped with it. It is a mature system that has been designed well to be able to cope with these fluctuations, and I think that that has been a real strength. In Scotland, it is a very young social security system and it was not able to ramp up in that same way in order to get new support through the centralised system, although it did go out through more local means. I think that that is something to take from the pandemic, the importance of those strong systems and administrative systems as well.

One overarching change I would make, and we are coming back to it a lot today, is adequacy and understanding how the basic rates are set. What is an adequate standard of living and, therefore, what does the benefit system need to provide as a minimum? That is a key thing. It is very hard to understand how benefit rates relate to any measure of cost of living. They were set, they have been inflated over time, occasionally frozen. We have the £20 uplift and reduction. It almost feels a little bit like it is a number, it does not relate to actual cost of living for people. I think that would be a good thing to focus on. Professor Scullion has talked about work she is doing on that and there is work that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has done on minimum living standards. Yes, that would be something that would help the system going forward to be fit for purpose.



Q39 **Rob Roberts:** Thank you, a wonderful link in to your fellow witness. Professor Scullion, your opinion?

**Professor Scullion:** I am going to put adequacy in as my key lesson, because I am reserving my overarching recommendation to another issue, so I am just sneaking it in there. Yes, looking at adequacy has been a key lesson with the pandemic. The fact that they increased the payment levels shows that it was an implicit recognition that the payment levels were not enough, in my view. So, a key lesson is around adequacy.

Similar to Emma, the system has worked, the system has held up, but it has shown that people who are claiming benefits want choice over these interactions. The digital system is okay for some, but people do want to have a choice over how the interactions take place, face to face, over the telephone, or digital. The pandemic has given us a chance to look at that and look at providing people with more choice over how the interactions take place.

As to a broad overarching recommendation, I would like to return to the discussion that we had about stigma, how we talk about benefit claimants, how society treats claimants and talks about benefit claimants. I guess we can look to Scotland and the language they use around dignity and respect. For me, a lot of the decisions that are made around the design of the system sometimes come from this stigmatised view we have of benefit claimants, that you need to coerce them to do things, that they are not intrinsically motivated to do things, and the fact that you need to have benefit levels paid at certain levels because it is a disincentive for those people who do not want to work. If we started to realise that, as Christina said, this is not a choice—people have not made choices to be in these situations—and if we started talking in ways that were not stigmatising, then perhaps we could also design systems that do not reinforce that.

Q40 **Rob Roberts:** It is an excellent point. I have had a family member who has been a work coach, and he would come around on a Sunday for our Sunday dinner and regale us with different stories about wonderful people who are really engaging with the thing and also that difficult side of his job, where people necessarily were obstructing the process. They are very good points, very well made. The same questions to Professor Beatty, to finish my section.

**Professor Beatty:** I am not sure that I am going to say anything different, really. On what we learned from the pandemic as to how the system has treated people, I think that it has been a much better attitude in terms of not enforcing sanctions, less conditionality, and a more positive attitude to how you engage with people within the system to try to support them, including the additional payment, which addresses some of the adequacy issue. If I had a magic wand, I want to say adequacy but I think for the individuals within the system, what Lisa said, the dignity and respect thing and treating people in a better way for a lot of individuals within the system would have a major difference on their lives and how they might look for opportunities and take opportunities rather than being fearful or feeling that they are being punished or talked about as though they don't matter.



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There are always going to be some who play the system but the majority do not play the system. It is not through choice and it is through need, so it is addressing that need and treating people in a decent way.

**Q41 Rob Roberts:** You mentioned sanctions once again and the lack of sanctions. Does anyone have any kind of statistics or assessment of what impact the removal of the sanctions has had on people's engagement with the system, whether that has been positive in ways other than just not being sanctioned? Has it helped engagement in any way?

**Professor Beatty:** I have not seen any evidence that it is a positive thing or helps people engage in the system. I did a study for Crisis of homeless people and their interaction with the system to do with sanctions. It showed that the most vulnerable suffered the most from sanctions and instead of engaging with the system they withdrew from the system and it was terrible for people with mental health and complex needs. I have not seen positive things in and around it.

**Professor Scullion:** If I can flag up from our welfare and social distance study, when we surveyed people at the beginning of the pandemic during the lockdown, people had lost jobs, the labour market was in the situation that it was, conditionality had been removed. However, a significant number of claimants we spoke to were still looking for work. To me that tells you that you don't need these kinds of extrinsic pressures, external pressures, that people are intrinsically motivated, if they can, if they are able to, to look for work. Even under those circumstances they were looking for work. They did not need this kind of compliance process within the system.

**Q42 Beth Winter:** Based on the evidence that you have presented this morning and the significant evidence that I have read on the topic, I want to state that the system is not working, based on what you say. It has exposed inadequacies in the system—stigmatisation, the whole narrative about deserving and undeserving poor and the ineffectiveness of enabling people to get back into work. I want to push you a bit further on the changes. We have asked the question about if you could do one thing for changes in the system. Do we need more fundamental change, an overhaul of the system? The notion of possibly introducing universal basic income has gained traction during the pandemic. I know there is some work going on in Scotland, and the First Minister of Wales has stated that he is going to undertake a pilot of universal basic income. There are also ideas such as minimum income guarantee being promoted to a greater extent. Do you have comments on the notion that we need to completely overhaul the system?

**Professor Beatty:** Personally, I am not convinced about universal basic income but mainly because a lot of the work I do is in and around employment support of claimants, people who have quite a significant need within the system. I am not sure how plausible it is with the levels that you would have to set it at to adequately cover the income you would have to provide. There would still have to be some means-testing element for housing, children and all the complexity of people's lives. I can't see how



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you set it at a level that covers the living costs of many people with families and/or high rent and/or disabilities or inability to work. If you still have to have a means-tested system on top of the UBI, I wonder how—I also think you can see with the job retention scheme where people start saying it is unaffordable, how does that stack up with public support for it if you are going to give everybody some level of payment, with some people who don't need it and some people who need more?

**Emma Congreve:** We have done a little work on this in Scotland and it has been talked about for years now. On universal basic income to start with, I agree very much with Professor Beatty about being able to set levels high enough to eradicate poverty, ideally. The problem we find is that when people talk about universal basic income, often they mean very different things. Some people mean it needs to be a minimum to cover so that no one is in poverty and that means quite a high level because it needs to cover all the different situations, the number of children and such like, that people are in. Other people talk about it as a minimum that everyone gets that is just there as a safety net and it is there so people can maybe retrain or take some time out of work if they need to without seeing their income drop to zero or having to engage with the system, and that is at a much lower level. They are two very different things.

In Scotland we looked at how it would need to be funded as well and we did that through the income tax system. When you change income tax rates, there are also impacts on incomes throughout the whole distribution that can have impacts on the economy as well. There is a lot to take into account. Cost-effectiveness is a really important part of thinking about social security in getting the right support to people who need it at a reasonable cost.

Minimum income guarantee is now being looked at in Scotland in quite a lot of detail. It is unclear whether it can be done under the current devolution settlement, mainly because of sanctions, which the powers in Scotland don't allow us to compensate for, although new benefits in Scotland such as the Scottish child payment would not have a sanction element within it but the existing sanctions remain. But the idea of that is the kind of bare minimum that people can rely on and there is a question of what level that should be set at and how you do that through the system.

There is certainly appetite for that kind of review of the fundamentals of the system and I think a lot of it is based on ensuring that incomes don't fall to zero at any point, which is just not tolerable in our society. Unfortunately, because of the complexities of the devolved settlement, it would be very hard to do, whereas I suppose if it was done at the UK level it would be more feasible.

Q43 **Beth Winter:** Professor Scullion, do you have any brief comments on that?

**Professor Scullion:** I am not a universal basic income expert and my understanding of it is similar to colleagues on the level at which it would be paid and issues like that. My research focuses on the system that we



have and looking at how we can improve the system that we have rather than introducing a fundamentally new system.

**Q44 Dr Wallis:** Can I talk a little bit about young people and the importance of getting them the employability support that they need from an early age? Can I ask you for a brief opinion on the UK Government's kickstart scheme and whether or not there is any evidence that that has different levels of impact in different parts of the United Kingdom? I will start with Professor Scullion, please.

**Professor Scullion:** Unfortunately this is not something that is covered within the research that I have done, so I can't comment on how it is working across the country. The survey data that we have shows that in the new benefit claimants there is an increasing number of young people. We are aware from the profile of benefit claimants that young people have been disproportionately impacted, along with black and minority ethnic populations as well.

**Professor Beatty:** I think the evidence is still out on it because it is almost too early to say. My research area is not specifically on it, but more generally around it and with some of the work that other people do, it is a very important thing to put opportunities in place for people disadvantaged in the labour market, especially young people, because otherwise you come into scarring on their employment trajectories for the rest of their lives. It is a good idea to have something that is targeted at them and I think the evidence will show how that leads to longer-term opportunities. But if you can do things especially in areas with weaker labour markets and working with employers to incentivise them to not just give them a six-month chance but to give them a longer chance to get a foothold in the labour market, that has to be a positive thing.

**Emma Congreve:** Unfortunately, it is too early to tell how it is working overall. There are a lot of employability schemes going on in Scotland. There is the devolved services as well as things like kickstart, which is UK-wide, so it is quite difficult to disentangle. We do a lot of work with people with learning disabilities in particular. The importance of getting support and advice and the right advice in school, a couple of years before they leave school, has been fundamentally voiced by people in schools and the sector to ensure that young people with additional support needs are getting the right support to get into the labour market, so that they are not getting these gaps that, as we know, are so difficult to overcome in later life for employment.

**Q45 Dr Wallis:** That is an excellent link into my next question. If we were to devolve some of the social security down to the Welsh Government, what do you think we could do differently in Wales to help young people? What do you think is the thing that we are missing? My understanding of the kickstart scheme is that the UK Government offer to pay the wages and national insurance of any qualifying young person that they took on for a period of six months. What more or what else could be done?



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**Emma Congreve:** Employability and the social security system are two slightly separate things, but there is much more that could be done for more support to people who need it. Working in schools and colleges in the system that we have is the right place to focus. You don't necessarily need these centrally funded schemes to identify where the biggest impact could be made. I am not sure if that would require any further devolution. It is in the system that exists at the moment.

The debate over what could be devolved to Wales for social security—you could go wherever you wanted with it really, particularly in support for young people. If we are talking about young people who don't have additional support needs, that is the means-tested benefit system or some elements of it, potentially the top-up elements that could be brought in to counter some of the lower rates that are available for younger people through the universal credit system. That might be one part of it. For young adults with additional support needs and the child disability to adult disability system, the interaction of those two things can be quite challenging for young people to navigate. If they were devolved you could look at the tie-up of those two systems for the transition period.

**Professor Scullion:** I can only draw on experience of some research that I was involved in with young people in Salford. That was around interaction with the benefit system and I guess it does intersect in ways around employability because the benefit system is meant to provide employment support. It goes back to providing quality employment support to young people who are in the benefit system. Some of the problems that we have in the research is that we had young people who were not engaging with the benefit system. They were not engaging in education or employment but also not engaging with the benefit system, so not drawing upon the financial support that they were entitled to. I think there is an issue there around why that might be the case. This was something we were concerned about.

From the interviews we have done with young people, a lot of this goes back to issues of stigma, the perceived hassle of what it is like to claim benefits as a young person, the expectations that there will be on them. Even if they have had no interaction, these perceptions loom large over whether they will engage with the DWP. Although the DWP in different areas is offering good practice in how it engages with young people, I think that without getting over some of the issues of the perception of what will happen when you engage with the DWP, it would be quite difficult for engaging with young people.

**Professor Beatty:** What the kickstart scheme offers in having subsidised jobs for the six-month period has to be a good thing. But if you have devolution and how you might continue or target schemes like that, not just for young people but for people with disabilities and other groups, or the over-50s potentially or older workers, that localises some of the elements of provision in the local context of what the economic or industrial breakdown is in particular areas. It is more nuanced in places to fit in with



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the local area so that it turns into a longer-term job opportunity rather than just a short-term trial.

How do you link that up with the apprenticeship scheme so that you are improving people's skills, employability and longer-term engagement with an employer who is investing in them and sees them as a long-term employee, so that they see that that returns back to them as a good employer and increases the productivity or the output from their company? I think the apprenticeship system is a little bit skew-whiff since the apprenticeship levy. It is how you make that work better, especially in local contexts, so that it supports employers' needs as well as the individuals' needs and has employability initiatives that give them skills that are needed so that they have a long-term prospect rather than just a short-term trial.

**Q46 Dr Wallis:** Thank you very much. It was a delight to see in my own Bridgend constituency how excited and enthusiastic a lot of the young people were just to have a chance. In that sense, I thought the scheme was a huge success. I will ask Emma Congreve about the partial devolution of social security to Scotland and how, if at all, do the Scottish Government intend to diverge from UK Government policy?

**Emma Congreve:** The key principle that has overridden the first few years of the changes has been the safe and secure transition of the case load, particularly for the big disability and carer benefits. That is still ongoing, but they are now starting to consult and think about changes to those systems. One change that came in quite early was a carer's allowance supplement. It is not a change to carer's allowance per se, because that is still being transferred, but it is an additional amount, two lump sum payments a year that is put on to carer's allowance to bring it up to the levels of jobseeker's allowance. They are thinking about how to retain that but to increase it further in the future.

With the child disability and adult disability payments that are coming through, the big focus has been on the assessment process. It is trying to reduce the face-to-face assessments, to try to make the process easier. As we have already talked about, making the whole experience better for claimants and easier to access so there is less stigma and more respect has been a huge part. I don't think we should underestimate the impact that that might have on people going into the system.

We are not right at the stage where they have decided whether there are going to be changes to eligibility or rates, but it is all going on at the moment. We are really starting to grapple with some of those things. Of course, legislation takes time to kick in. There is a lot of complexity in working these things out because of the interaction with the services in policy spillovers. They seem to be being resolved with DWP to understand the implications of them, but it does make it quite difficult to plan and cost policy and for the stakeholder community to fully understand how the system all works together via the fiscal framework. It is not as simple as deciding, "It will cost x because this is the amount more that will go to



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people; let's do it". There is then the second layer of how it interacts with the reserved system as well. I think it is a "watch this space" part of things.

Scotland has these devolved powers and also powers to top up and create new benefits. The main change that is being used is to top up new benefits beside the Scottish child payment. That is based on if you are eligible and you have children, you are on legacy or universal credit, you are now eligible for an extra £10 a week per child. That is currently just for the under-sixes and over the next few years that will roll out to all children under 16 and it will double to £20 a week by the end of this Parliament. That is the biggest fundamental change in the new changes that have come into the system. It is in direct response to the child poverty targets that the Scottish Parliament unanimously agreed and the targets are due within the next decade.

**Dr Wallis:** Thank you for answering that question and what would have been my next three questions as well. That was great, thank you.

Q47 **Chair:** Ms Congreve, if I could follow up on that thinking about the Scottish context, have you done any work or do you know of any analytical work that has been done looking at what Scottish welfare would look like under independence?

**Emma Congreve:** The problem is that we don't know what the system would be proposed to be under independence. I believe the civil service is starting to work again on those proposals. What the scheme would look like could change significantly. We could have a minimum income guarantee, we could have universal basic income if we had the powers to do that. There would be the transfer of resources and one of the key things would be the transfer of data to Scotland of the people who claim social security in Scotland via DWP. It would turn into a system that could look very different and it would be funded entirely from Scottish-raised money. There has been no analysis because we don't know what it would be in the future yet.

Q48 **Chair:** I am genuinely not trying to open up a whole different can of worms here. I am just interested because as the Welsh Affairs Committee we are interested in the devolved context and where those debates could lead to in the future. Labour market data that was out this week was pretty strong again. I will ask the whole panel: have you been surprised by how strongly and how quickly the UK labour market has rebounded post-Covid? Do you get a sense that there is a chance that we might be entering a period now where, because of a tight labour market, wages get bid up? What implications are there for welfare policy or demand on universal credit from that kind of scenario emerging, or are you less optimistic?

**Emma Congreve:** It has been a bit of a recurring theme in this session, but we still don't know the impact of the pandemic on the labour market because it is not until the furlough scheme is fully wound down that we will see what happens to unemployment. The labour market has remained strong but the implications of furlough for that—we don't know what is going to happen in the next few months. I think it is definitely too soon to say too much about that. The structure of the labour force has obviously



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changed. How much of that is due to Brexit and how much is due to the pandemic, again is quite difficult to untangle but certainly you see, walking down the street, a lot of vacancies, particularly in hospitality.

The problem is are they the right jobs in the right places? A lot of people in the social security system have children. Are they jobs that people can feasibly take up and do enough hours with all the constraints that they face in their daily lives? I think we will have a period of adjustment as we understand what has happened to the labour force and the local economies as well. I think there will be a lot of flux and it will take time to settle down and we will see in the short term an increase in people going into the social security system as we navigate through that. I am not sure quite how long that will take.

**Q49 Chair:** Thank you. Personally speaking, I can't recall a time in Pembrokeshire in west Wales where so many employers from so many sectors over the summer have told me the same thing—that they can't hire staff. Colleagues from all around the country have been reporting similar anecdotes. Professor Scullion, do you want to respond to that?

**Professor Scullion:** Again to bring in the research that I am involved in, the research is ongoing. We are going to do a survey that will come after the furlough scheme has ended, so maybe I can come back to you about how many of those we surveyed have come out of the furlough scheme and ended up with universal credit. We would be happy to share that. We have done some in-depth interviews in our sample where the furlough scheme had finished for people at some point and they had moved within the social security system. I agree with Emma that we will see an increasing number of people come into the benefit system and how we support them will be important.

Over the years of doing research, an issue that has come up from the perspective of people who are in the social security system, the people who I have spoken to, is the low quality of the jobs they are taking, the temporary nature. The insecurity of the employment is time and again an issue for people. In our studies we have seen experiences of people cycling in and out of the benefit system, taking work temporarily, then they come back into the system. People are moving in and out of this kind of precarious labour market.

**Q50 Chair:** Thank you very much. Professor Beatty, do you have anything to add?

**Professor Beatty:** The employment figures and PAYE figures last week were encouraging but, as Emma said, until the job retention scheme is over we really don't know how things will pan out. We are another couple of months off seeing the fallout from that and the people still within the scheme and relative to increased demand. There is the combination of that with Brexit and labour supply from Europe and how that is going to affect stronger demand, which hopefully will lead through to stronger wages in particular types of jobs. The figures that were released last week were still



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very much talking about overall, aggregate level of demand and that pans out very differently in different parts of the country.

We can get a bit like we were pre-pandemic, where we think the employment rate is at an all-time high, but, as Lisa and Emma said, it is about the types of jobs, the levels of pay and the stability of some of those jobs and how that means you can get into employment but you are still reliant on the benefit system. How do you improve wages, conditions and where those jobs are? I see job adverts in and around local areas for some bar staff and various things but I have not seen an abundance in some of the more deprived neighbourhoods or in certain places, and the city centre is very quiet.

The labour force vacancies data and the PAYE data have issues at the moment and some of that background stuff to do with data may not be all that it seems, but I think the signs are encouraging.

**Q51 Chair:** Thank you very much. I have a final very quick question for the panel. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer was persuaded this autumn to reinvest £2 billion or £3 billion more into the welfare system, where should that go to get the best effect? Should it go back into the universal credit standard allowance or would it be better to use that to reduce the work taper rates, to improve how much money people can hold on to when they work those extra hours, or would you advocate using that money to do something around housing costs or childcare costs? Those are the kinds of conversations that will be happening between DWP and Treasury. What would you advise?

**Professor Beatty:** I think the taper is too high and there are issues around the housing benefit, local housing allowance, all those elements of housing costs that have not been working for quite some time that need to be addressed. Some elements of it would help all round the individuals on low incomes. I think that targeting any measures that support the most vulnerable or those with children is a good move.

**Professor Scullion:** I agree with Christina in targeting those who are disproportionately impacted and those with more complex needs and looking at the taper.

**Emma Congreve:** We have been looking at social security support, child poverty, and one of the key things that would make a big difference would be the removal of the two-child limit and ensuring that money goes to larger families that have more mouths to feed and more constraints with work. That would be a focus.

**Q52 Geraint Davies:** Christina Beatty, I think you suggested that there is a complexity. Do you think, irrespective of levels of investment, the move to universal credit is any better than the previous system? Secondly, where we have seen devolution in particular in Wales in education we have seen them moving towards grants instead of fees under the system. If social security devolved, couldn't we integrate the education system to combine productivity and added value with the benefit system more effectively than



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having them detached, given that the Welsh Government have shown that they can make these changes?

**Professor Beatty:** Anything that is more joined up across policy areas is a good move. Whether it is education and those sorts of things alongside how the housing support mechanism works or labour market works is an important thing. Sorry, I lost the beginning bit of your question there.

Q53 **Geraint Davies:** The other thing was universal credit versus a more sophisticated system.

**Professor Beatty:** Yes, sorry. Maybe I was trying to blank that out. I think in some cases there is a lot to be commended with the ideals of universal credit as simplifying the benefit system that used to be very fractionalised, whether it is housing benefit, tax credits. The idea of it being a more holistic system that creates better or more simple access to and income from is a good one. But with some of the things that have been integrated into it over time, such as the levels that the work allowances are set at or have been reduced to, the taper, various other things, and elements of the entitlements within it, it is quite harsh compared with how it was originally designed and how that interacts with Jobcentre Plus sanctions and support. It is much harsher than the original system.

I think there are possibly some issues in and around how it integrates with the real-time employment data and stability of income, which I don't think they necessarily foresaw at the beginning because it was meant to be, "Let's have your benefit claim in one package." How can we change some of the bits to do with going back to two-weekly payments, having direct payments to landlords and various other things, implementation, which can be done more easily at a devolved level? Northern Ireland and Scotland have done some of those things. There are bits of how it operates with the system you have rather than reinventing the wheel and going back. I think there is still hope for it.

**Geraint Davies:** Perhaps people can submit additional evidence if they want to, because obviously it is so complicated and we have run out of time, Chair.

**Chair:** Absolutely. Time is against us but we have covered a lot of ground this morning. It has been really helpful and very interesting. On a number of points, different members of the panel offered to send further information, which we would love to receive as and when that becomes available within the different work projects that you are doing. Thank you again for your time this morning, Professor Beatty, Professor Scullion and Ms Congreve. It has been really helpful. Thank you to my fellow Committee members for making it such a productive session.