
REPORT

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO POVERTY

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This report looks at current public attitudes to poverty and how views have changed since the 2008 financial crash.

It also explores the public's views on how poverty should be defined, what causes it and what kinds of policies might be effective in tackling poverty in the UK. The findings of this report are based on qualitative research including discussion groups, in-depth interviews and a workshop.

Key points:

- While harder views towards poverty remain, the economic circumstances of recent years have encouraged some to reconsider both who might be affected by poverty and its causes.
- Participants believed the official poverty measure to be too narrow; they considered poverty to be about more than just income. They also questioned whether the term 'poverty' was appropriate in the UK context.
- JRF's needs-based definition was viewed positively, although participants still felt that this did not encapsulate all that a life in poverty is. Participants suggested that factors such as lack of opportunity, lack of aspiration and inability to participate in society could also be included.
- While the idea of the 'undeserving poor' created tension, deeper attitudes were that personal choices are rarely the root cause of poverty. Those living in areas of high deprivation in particular felt that poor life choices were manifestations of long-term structural and economic barriers.

Participants believed that anti-poverty policies needed to directly target those who needed them, and should focus on helping people into work and ensure that work pays.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has been investigating the root causes of poverty for over 100 years. Its core aim is to 'search for the causes of and solutions to poverty in the UK. These include practical strategies to reduce poverty, and wider social and economic inequalities, focusing particularly on the contribution of work, skills and economic growth.'¹

Between 2007 and 2009, the JRF conducted a Public Interest in Poverty Issues programme, which involved commissioning new and reviewing existing research into public attitudes to poverty. However, the programme was based mainly on studies conducted before the recession and thus did not capture the public's attitudes to poverty in the light of austerity conditions.

This report brings together qualitative data from: eight in-depth interviews with people living below the relative poverty line; four discussion groups in areas of high deprivation; and a day-long deliberative workshop with 50 people drawn from a broad cross-section of society. The objectives of the research were as follows:

- What do the public understand poverty to be, how do they define it and what are their attitudes towards the UK definition of poverty? Is poverty the best word to describe this?
- What are the public's attitudes towards poverty and how have these been shaped?
- What is the best way to communicate poverty, and which messages best overcome the misconceptions?

Have attitudes to poverty changed?

Many of the attitudes that the JRF uncovered as part of its programme of work into what the public think about poverty have held firm; in particular, there is continued concern about those who are perceived to have 'chosen' a life in poverty. That said, there is also evidence to suggest that the difficult economic circumstances of the past few years have served to soften people's views in relation to poverty. Indeed, from the qualitative work, it appeared that participants were less willing to accept that employment is a guaranteed route out of poverty, citing zero-hours contracts and stagnating wages as evidence of this. Further, participants also discussed how poverty is something that can affect anyone; the financial precarity and lack of job security that many had experienced in recent years led them to feel more empathic towards those below the poverty line.

What is poverty?

Defining what it means to live in poverty was difficult, not least because the word 'poverty' itself was felt to be problematic in the UK context. Participants believed that the term was too loaded, evoking issues faced by people in the developing world rather than their own communities.

Further, the relative income poverty measure², used within the European Union to define and measure poverty rates, was not seen as an accurate definition of poverty. The main issue was that participants did not believe that poverty and relative income inequality were the same thing. Income inequality was viewed as somewhat inevitable – someone will always be at the bottom – but they felt that being at the bottom did not necessarily mean that someone would have to be poor.

The JRF 'needs-based' definition (see right) was generally viewed more positively as it reflected the way participants themselves spoke of this issue. Describing poverty as an inability to meet basic needs was felt to be a more accurate way of identifying poverty than by income alone, as long the needs were clearly defined as fundamental needs everyone has, such as food, energy, housing, education and healthcare. In addition, participants felt that including the experience of poverty in the definition was important and suggested a number of factors to create a clearer picture of what it means to live in poverty in the UK today:

- not having a support network;
- lack of opportunities and choice;
- lack of aspiration;
- not being able to participate or feel included in society;
- psychological impact of poverty; and
- duration of the experience.

What causes poverty?

Participants put forward numerous causes for poverty, which can broadly be separated into three types:

- 1 Current economic and structural causes such as cost of living, lack of jobs and in-work poverty:** participants generally focused on these causes as they directly impacted upon a person's ability to meet their own basic needs. Additionally, as participants believed that poverty had increased since the economic downturn in 2008 and that these factors were most often discussed within the media, they assumed there must be a strong causal link between the two.
- 2 Long-term structural causes leading to a lack of aspiration and opportunity:** while recent economic conditions were considered the main cause of poverty, some participants, particularly those who were older or lived in areas of high deprivation, were mindful that poverty had existed even during times of economic prosperity.
- 3 Causes relating to individuals, either within or outside their own control:** for most participants, this was used to make a distinction between 'the deserving poor', who were perceived as having no control over their situation, and those considered to be less deserving, whom participants believed had chosen a life in poverty.

Poverty is when someone's resources (especially material resources) are not sufficient for their needs (especially material needs).

Whether you have enough resources to meet your needs is affected by several different things including:

- your income;
- the cost of living (especially of essentials such as food, heating, housing and transport);
- what kind of credit you can access (and what debt you end up with); and
- what kind of services you can get: health, education, childcare, care for older people.

JRF definition of poverty

What can be done?

Participants' reactions to five policy ideas generated for the purposes of discussion suggested that a number of key principles guided their views on the likely effectiveness of policies as well as their desirability. These were as follows:

- 1 Focus on the people who need help rather than universal approaches:** policies that were perceived as targeting the people who needed support were viewed as more effective and desirable than ones that could potentially benefit everyone.
- 2 Focus on employment:** helping to get people into work and making work pay, either by increasing wages or reducing taxes only for those on the lowest incomes, were seen as the only long-term solutions to poverty.
- 3 Carrots are better than sticks:** this attitude applied to both individuals and employers. Rewards to encourage people to work or encourage employers to offer a fair deal were viewed as being more effective in terms of getting people to change their behaviour, and were considered less risky than regulation or cutting support.

How do you engage the public?

To help shift negative attitudes, and to ensure the public are supportive of anti-poverty strategies, our research would suggest that the four following steps are important to consider:

- 1 Stop talking about 'poverty':** referring to 'need' was thought to be clearer and more appropriate than 'poverty'.
- 2 Change the measurement:** a definition based on a person's inability to meet their own basic needs is more likely to capture the experience of poverty.
- 3 Myth-busting on its own won't help change attitudes:** engaging people with the root causes of poverty with a 'life course' narrative can prompt discussion about why a child living in poverty is viewed with sympathy, while an adult who grew up in poverty is not.
- 4 People are open to ambitious solutions:** multi-agency solutions that included government, employers and the voluntary sector were considered to be more realistic and likely to succeed than the government attempting to tackle the issue alone.

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

Research context

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) has been investigating the root causes of poverty for over 100 years. Its core aim is to 'search for the causes of and solutions to poverty in the UK. These include practical strategies to reduce poverty, and wider social and economic inequalities, focusing particularly on the contribution of work, skills and economic growth.'³

In 2007, Ipsos MORI conducted a study for the JRF, *Understanding attitudes to poverty in the UK: Getting the public's attention*⁴. The research found that the public were a long way off supporting an anti-poverty agenda and were equally wary of offering more support – in the form of welfare – in case this reduced work incentives further. An important element that was driving this attitude was that, as a result of long-term economic stability in the UK, the public felt that there was no reason for people to be in poverty, and that people found themselves in poverty as a consequence of bad life choices.

Given all that has happened economically since the work was conducted in 2007, it made sense to revisit the central research questions of how the public perceive poverty and the factors that drive support for tackling it.

Research objectives

The overall programme of research aimed to understand the following:

- What do the public understand poverty to be, how do they define it and what are their attitudes towards the UK definition? Is poverty the best word to describe this?
- What are the public's attitudes towards poverty and how have these been shaped?
- What is the best way to communicate poverty, and which messages best overcome the misconceptions?

Methodology

Several qualitative methods were used during the research, including:

- eight in-depth interviews with people whose income is below the relative poverty line in London, Liverpool and Birmingham;
- four discussion groups in areas of high deprivation, split between Liverpool and Birmingham; participants included both those in work and not in work and with a range of incomes; and
- a day-long deliberative workshop with 50 people in London.

The data gathered from the interviews and groups was used to inform the workshop discussion. Discussion groups were conducted in areas with a depressed labour market to act as a comparison for data from the London workshop in exploring whether people's attitudes to poverty were influenced by local labour market conditions. Birmingham and Liverpool were selected for the discussion groups as areas in the top five English cities for levels of workless households⁵. The in-depth interviews with people living in poverty were used to shape materials for the workshop as they helped us outline the types of people that are currently living in poverty in the UK. A deliberative event was conducted in order to allow us to explore the issues in greater detail than in a traditional qualitative setting such as a discussion group or in-depth interview. It also allowed for a broader set of questions and wider range of stimulus and evidence to be presented to participants because there was more time to discuss separate elements in detail.

The interviews and discussion groups took place in November 2013. The day-long workshop of 50 people took place in April 2014. Participants who attended the workshop were given £100 as a 'thank-you' for their time, and participants who took part in an interview or focus group were given £30 and £35 respectively. Please see Appendix A for details of sampling and recruitment.

Research materials

Semi-structured discussion guides were used in the interviews, discussion groups and workshop to ensure that the key issues were explored and that all the key topic areas were covered consistently. The in-depth interviews lasted between one hour and an hour and a half. The discussion groups lasted for an hour and a half. The deliberative workshop lasted six hours.

Different versions of the semi-structured discussion guide were produced for the three research elements. The workshop also used stimulus material to prompt conversation. The discussion guides can be found in Appendix B.

Interpreting the data

Qualitative research is illustrative, detailed and exploratory. The volume and richness of the data generated in qualitative research mean that theories can be developed through analysis that did not exist at the outset. It offers insights into the perceptions, feelings and behaviours of people rather than quantifiable conclusions from a statistically representative sample.

Owing to the small sample size and the purposive nature with which it was drawn, findings cannot be considered to be representative of the views of the general public as a whole. As such, the word 'participant' has been used throughout the report in reference to an individual who took part in the research.

HAVE ATTITUDES TO POVERTY CHANGED?

Introduction

Public attitudes to poverty matter a great deal. As acknowledged by the JRF, public attitudes ‘inform the level of support for action by government and others to tackle poverty. While public support does not always translate into government policy, greater support is certainly more likely to result in sustained and increased action by all levels of government’⁶. Public attitudes have a direct impact on the day-to-day experiences of people living in poverty.

This section of the report examines not only what the public’s attitudes to poverty are but also, by drawing on previous work conducted by the JRF – in particular its Public Interest in Poverty Issues (PIPI) programme, which ran between 2007 and 2009 – seeks to determine how these have changed, if at all.

How have attitudes changed?

Research conducted and reviewed as part of the PIPI programme⁷ found that public awareness of the extent and reality of UK poverty was limited; there was a widespread belief that poverty in the UK was either inevitable or an individual’s own fault⁸.

Participants in qualitative research⁹ conducted as part of the PIPI programme painted a picture of a country where opportunities existed for those willing and able to take them, but with a welfare system to support those who could not do so. This meant that poverty, insofar as participants believed it existed at all, tended to be viewed as something experienced either by ‘skivers’ who chose to live that way or the ‘deserving poor’, who experienced poverty due to events outside their control such as ill-health or redundancy. The idea of a person who was willing and able to take the opportunities available to them – in terms of employment and also support from the state – but who still found themselves in poverty was difficult to comprehend; indeed, they doubted that such a person existed.

However, recent work¹⁰ has indicated that public attitudes towards poverty are closely linked to economic circumstances. To illustrate, detailed analysis of NatCen’s British Social Attitudes (BSA) data has shown that the view that people live in need because they have been unlucky, while never widely held, increased during both recessions of the early 1990s

and late 2000s, while the view that poverty is the result of laziness or a lack of willpower declined at these times. This may result from the greater recognition of the view that 'when times are bad, that individuals have little control over economic circumstances and their impacts upon them – as well as the greater likelihood that the respondents themselves might have experienced economic hardship during these periods'¹¹.

The BSA report for 2013¹² gave further evidence that public attitudes might be softening, particularly regarding benefits and unemployment. The number of people who agreed with the statement that benefits are 'too high and discourage work' fell 11 percentage points from a high of 62% in 2011. Additionally, about half thought the unemployed could get a job if they really wanted one, down from two-thirds in the boom years of the previous decade. This could be an example of what has been referred to as the 'thermostat effect'¹³; i.e. as a room gets colder, we want to turn the heat up, even if our ideal temperature is unchanged, and vice versa. In the context of the benefits system, this means that as more welfare cuts are made, people may react by wanting the government to spend more on benefits – even if their underlying view about the ideal level of spending remains constant¹⁴.

Based mainly on pre-recession studies, the findings from the JRF's PIPI programme conducted between 2007 and 2009 are therefore unsurprising given the economic context of the time. However, it is worth noting just how persistent some of these views are – even in the face of the economic crisis in 2008 and the vast raft of cuts to welfare and support that have been implemented since the 2010 election.

In particular, the word 'poverty' itself is still seen as problematic in the UK context, even among those who believe that it is a problem. They stated that the word is too strong and invokes images of absolute poverty in the developing world rather than their conception of how poverty manifests itself in the UK with, for instance, people making difficult choices between heating and eating. Indeed, even those living in poverty reported that the term made them feel uncomfortable, and left them open to being stigmatised by others.

The strength of the word also seemed to encourage participants to doubt the severity and prevalence of poverty or question whether it really existed at all, because applying it to the UK did not feel right. Additionally, there was a gap between what participants believed poverty to be and the relative poverty measure used in the UK. This was not only because they believed that the income level used was too high but also because they did not think about poverty purely in terms of income. Poverty was, as far as they were able to express it, defined by a person's ability to meet certain needs and their day-to-day experience, rather than their relative income. This in turn drove the perception that the government is not measuring poverty at all; as in 2007, participants felt that poverty can only really be described as an experience rather than as an income level.

Poverty is so much more abstract than a line. You can't make it black and white.

Participant, low-/middle-income discussion group, Liverpool

There were still tensions about the causes of poverty and, as a consequence, how it should be tackled. While this will be discussed in more detail later in this report, continued concern about those in poverty through personal choice put a block on participants supporting increases in financial support for those on benefits. This echoes findings from the PIPI programme;

Bamfield and Horton¹⁵ found a widely held view that people on benefits – in particular Jobseeker's Allowance – do not and will not make a reciprocal contribution to society. This put a major block on building support for measures that tackle poverty via these means, something this study also uncovered. Additionally, due to increased awareness of in-work poverty, questions were also raised as to how effective this solution can be, with participants instead focusing on the role of employers.

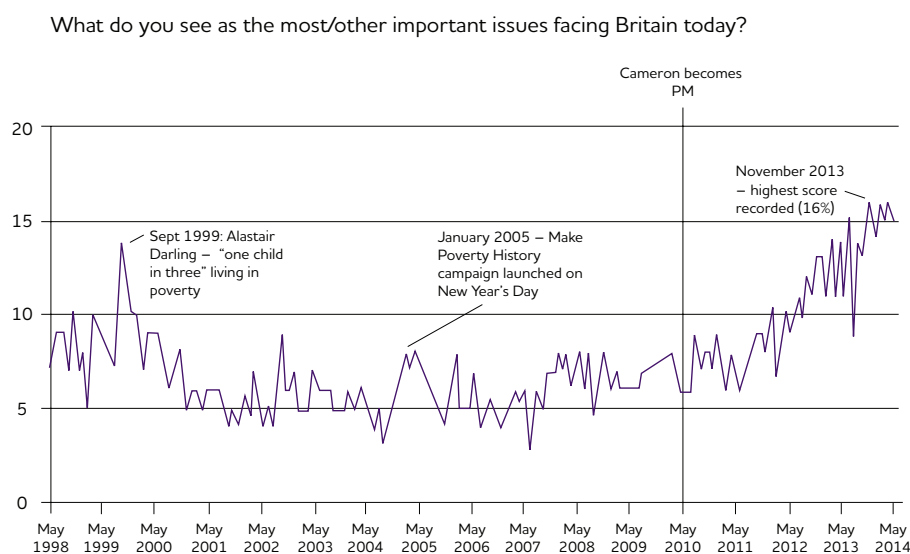
However, for all the similarities with the PIP programme of work, there are also stark differences. While the word 'poverty' still conjured up associations with developing countries, participants were nonetheless likely to discuss issues closer to home: benefit cuts, unemployment, the rise in the number of people using food banks, fuel poverty, zero-hour contracts, payday loans and homelessness were all mentioned repeatedly, with participants suggesting that their heightened awareness of these issues was a result of what they had seen and heard in the news, with those living in areas of high deprivation also referring to what they had seen in their own communities.

Tesco runs a food bank outside the store and every time I go shopping it's like the queue for it is longer. You can't tell me that all those people just want something for free, the look on their faces tells me that's not true. It's not what you expect to see in modern-day Britain. It's desperate.

Participant, low-/middle-income discussion group, Liverpool

Indeed, this is reflected in Ipsos MORI's regular polling data on issues facing Britain. In 2007, only one respondent in 20 identified poverty/inequality as a matter of concern, but since the financial crisis of 2008, this figure has steadily risen to around one in six (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: Polling data on poverty/inequality 1998–2014, with key milestones



Building on this, not only do the public believe that poverty is more of a problem, they also take a broader view of whom it affects. While concerns about the 'deservingness' of benefit claimants persist, the public are also aware that work is not necessarily a guaranteed route out of poverty that it perhaps once was. To make their point, participants referred to employers' increased use of zero-hours contracts, reductions to in-work benefits and the rising cost of living, all of which were perceived to make it more difficult for those on a low income to support a life above the poverty line.

There are so many people on the breadline being paid less than [the] minimum they need to live. Not enough council housing for them. People in full-time jobs can't even afford to do certain things and stigma about needing to claim benefits to top-up their wages. How do you survive?

Participant, middle-/higher income group, workshop, aged 30–59, London

There was also evidence to suggest that participants feel closer to those living in poverty than previously; there is less of a distinction between 'them' and 'us'. To illustrate, participants spoke of how they themselves can struggle to make ends meet given rising prices and, as a result, feel more able to relate to those on lower incomes who face these problems more acutely. Further, the economic turmoil of the past few years has highlighted to participants that it is possible for anyone to fall into poverty – particularly during times of economic uncertainty when fewer jobs are secure. Indeed, this precarity was felt – and even experienced – by participants in the research, some of whom had lost their jobs, which in turn had left them struggling to maintain their outgoings and service long-term financial commitments.

They reckon that we're all two weeks away from disaster; we all have so much we have to pay out. Everyone has debts they need to pay off. You may have a nice house but if you lose your job then financially you could end up worse off than someone who has been living day-to-day for years. You'd have to do the same and also have all that debt hanging over you.

Participant, middle-/higher income discussion group, Liverpool

This research therefore suggests that while some harder views towards poverty remain, the difficult economic circumstances of recent years have encouraged some to reconsider both who might be affected by poverty and what its causes are. This softening of attitudes and the acknowledgment that even those in work can be affected represent an opportunity to engage the public in the issues in order to build support for an anti-poverty agenda. The rest of this report explores this in more detail, along with outlining ways in which anti-poverty messages could be communicated.

WHAT IS POVERTY?

Introduction

This section discusses how poverty should be defined. It includes attitudes to the relative income poverty measure and UK poverty statistics. It also explores participants' attitudes to the JRF's needs-based definition of poverty and how such a definition affects public attitudes to poverty. Finally, it outlines what participants think should be included in a UK poverty definition and their reasons for this.

Attitudes to relative income poverty measure

The relative income poverty measure¹⁶, used in the EU to define and measure poverty rates, made little sense to participants. Principally, this was because they did not think of poverty as something that could be defined by any kind of relative income measure. The idea of drawing a line based on income that defined all of those who fell below it as living in poverty felt arbitrary and did not chime with how they viewed people's experiences of poverty, which were thought to be much more fluid and volatile and about more than income alone. However, some participants acknowledged that any attempt to monitor poverty would necessitate a clear definition which would most likely comprise arbitrary measures. They felt that the value of this would be to measure how poverty rates change over time and to enable governments to set targets accordingly.

It's an arbitrary way of doing it but I imagine it's hard to come up with something that makes sense and this is as good as any. You have a car that has government figures, miles per gallon etc.; they're done in a lab but every driver of that car would probably say something different. It's a way of comparing things tested in the same environment, not about what happens in the real world.

Participant, middle-/higher income discussion group, Liverpool

A stronger criticism of the measure was where the poverty line had been drawn. Most participants instinctively felt that the poverty-line income was too high and households at or just below the line could not, in most cases, be legitimately defined as living in poverty. This is because they viewed the income as high enough for many households to be able to cover their basic needs.

Variation in the cost of living across the UK was also mentioned as a reason why the poverty measure is, in its current state, unworkable; participants stated that people on the same income would not necessarily have the same standard of living, depending on where they lived. Particularly critical were those whose income was either just below or above the line, and who were typically surprised to find that they might be considered to be living in poverty, or on the cusp of it. They believed that even though they sometimes struggled financially, there were still many who were worse off than themselves. These participants tended to speak more of absolute poverty – including families who could not feed themselves – in order to make their point more strongly.

[Poverty is] living on the breadline... living hand to mouth... people not being able to feed their children and selves.

Female participant, income below poverty line, in-depth interview, Birmingham

Official poverty statistics¹⁷ also failed to resonate with participants. While this was largely due to the fact that they did not agree with the relative measure, scepticism towards official statistics also played a part. Regardless of the views they held on poverty, what participants agreed on was that the measure and statistics would likely be manipulated by government to suit its own agenda. This was influenced by where participants lived. For those living in areas of high deprivation, there was a sense that the statistics shown to them were too low, and did not equate with what they saw around them every day. Conversely, those in better-off areas tended to presume that the figures given for people living in poverty were too high.

That sounds too low; I reckon more live in poverty than that. The government will just try and make it look lower than it is so it looks like they've done something.

Participant, low-/middle-income discussion group, Liverpool

Poverty was not simply about a person's income. Many participants felt that other financial factors should be taken into account when determining the existence and extent of poverty, including essential outgoings and debt. The extent to which a household could afford to pay for outgoings such as childcare or running a car were seen as important issues to consider as they would be essential for some people depending upon their circumstances. Additionally, the level of debt paid from a household's income was also felt to be important because servicing debts could prevent households from being able to afford basic needs such as food and heating.

Income doesn't really tell you everything about someone's financial situation. If you based it on debt, income and cost of living that would be interesting.

Participant, middle-/higher income discussion group, Liverpool

The view that poverty could not be defined by income was linked with the widely held view that poverty is an experience of life determined by more than money and was different from income inequality. The distinction was important as it not only influenced how participants felt that poverty should be defined but it also affected the extent to which they believed that it

should and could be tackled. To illustrate, income inequality was thought to be inevitable; some people will always be at the bottom. Participants felt that there was little that could be done to tackle this as the gap would always exist but this would not necessarily be a problem because being at the bottom did not mean that someone would be poor. What was thought to be important was the experience of those at the bottom; having less than others might be inevitable, but it should be possible for them to have enough to afford a decent standard of living; something that participants felt more positive about being able to address.

Poverty is inevitable. You are going to have upper class and lower class in a capitalist system. But what the bottom is... does it have to be so low?

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

Attitudes to the JRF definition of poverty

Using the word ‘poverty’ when discussing issues faced by people in the UK was seen to be problematic by participants. Although they could accept that issues related to poverty existed, the term itself was felt to be inappropriate in the UK context. The first reason for this was that the word was felt to be too loaded, and associated with developing countries, which led participants to think that poverty did not really exist in the UK by comparison. The second reason was that even in discussions about poverty in the UK, participants rarely talked about the same issues at the same time, leading to confusion about what was meant by the term in the UK context. To try and overcome these communication barriers, participants were asked which words or phrases might better define the issues faced by people in the UK. The word ‘need’ was suggested by many as being clearer and more appropriate.

I think it's just basic needs. I think if you can't meet those needs you would consider yourself to be in poverty.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

In the light of this, the JRF's needs-based definition of poverty (below) was tested during the research.

JRF definition of poverty

Poverty is when someone's resources (especially material resources) are not sufficient for their needs (especially material needs). Whether you have enough resources to meet your needs is affected by several different things including:

- your income;
- the cost of living (especially of essentials such as food, heating, housing and transport);
- what kind of credit you can access (and what debt you end up with); and
- what kind of services you can get: health, education, childcare, care for older people.

Given their views on the appropriateness of the term 'need' rather than 'poverty', participants were broadly positive about this definition as it reflected the way they themselves spoke of this issue. Despite this, the JRF definition was still considered to be problematic because it did not specify the type of needs that it referred to. As a consequence, confusion arose as to whether 'needs' was referring to what participants would consider lifestyle-related needs (such as consumer goods) or fundamental needs that they would consider everyone has, including food, energy, housing, education and healthcare.

Should be fundamental basic needs like food, water, health, education

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Nailing this issue down was considered crucial; the subjectivity of the word 'need' fed concerns and suspicion that poverty is, in some cases, experienced as a result of poor decision-making and incorrect priorities, and that such individuals did not deserve further support or sympathy. This was confused further by the use of the term 'material needs' which many associated with materialism, further fuelling the view that people may claim to be living in poverty in cases where, for example, they were not able to afford a new mobile phone or television.

It's the word 'material' is throwing people off. Because for us material needs are something that's a luxury, not an essential.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

While the use of the word 'resources' was confusing for some, particularly younger participants, older participants tended to be positive about considering resources more widely than income. These participants felt that the use of the word 'resources' would help to overcome the issue of two people with the same income having different experiences by considering the wider factors that affect a person's quality of life and, crucially, their ability to improve it.

Lack of resources. People in this situation... they do want to work yet if they go to work they can only do 20 hours and they've got to pay childcare. [The] system is designed so that people are poor.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

What should be added to the definition?

Although participants were generally positive about the approach taken in the needs-based definition, most felt that it had failed to capture the experience of poverty. These factors were what some participants believed made living in poverty different from being poor for a short period of time, as a result of unemployment or being a student for instance. Participants therefore suggested a number of additions that could be made to create a clearer picture of what it means to live in poverty in the UK today. Many of these factors were also raised by participants who were living below the relative poverty line in discussions around whether or not they viewed themselves as living in poverty.

- Not having a support network

Linked with the discussion of resources, participants felt that even those on the lowest incomes might not be considered to be in poverty if they had financial but also emotional and practical support from those around them. Indeed, some participants felt that having a safety net was a bigger factor in defining poverty than being able to access the 'credit' cited in the definition. They believed that people defined as living in poverty would not have a source of informal borrowing available if they needed it, as well as help in the form of informal childcare, advice or emotional support.

Misses out safety and the people around you and not having a safety net if you don't have that support you could fall into poverty.

Participant, all-income workshop, aged 18–29, London

- Lack of opportunities and choice

This related to both long-term opportunities such as good-quality education and employment and short-term choices such as being able to move house or take in a lodger to help with housing costs. Not being able to make these decisions or take up opportunities was thought to leave people trapped in the circumstances in which they found themselves. Participants felt strongly that the absence of choice or opportunities was a key determinant in whether a person lived in poverty or was simply living a life they had chosen for themselves, for example by having the opportunity to work but choosing not to.

If you have a choice, then you are not in poverty.

Participant, low-/middle-income discussion group, Birmingham

This view was shared by participants whose own income was below the relative poverty line. Some participants who did not view themselves as living in poverty discussed their ability to make choices that meant that although they were living on a low income, they still felt in control of their lives. This could include, for example, choosing not to work until their children were older or leaving a relationship which they felt was damaging to themselves and their children. Conversely, those who did describe themselves as living in poverty often spoke of the lack of opportunities or choices available to them, which meant that they felt trapped in their circumstances, particularly in the type of housing they could live in and employment opportunities.

When you live in temporary accommodation you have no choice, they give you a house and you have to live in it, or live on the street. There are no jobs, and there is a waiting list to volunteer.

Female participant, income below poverty line, in-depth interview, Liverpool

- Lack of aspiration

Lack of aspiration was often linked with inter-generational poverty and the communities in which people lived. Many participants felt that growing up in a workless household or deprived community often meant that people did not consider how they might be able to live a different life when they were older. This was an issue discussed at length among participants in Liverpool, who felt that lack of awareness of how life might be different or that they would be able to achieve anything other than what they had always known was the greatest barrier to people from the poorest communities.

Those living below the poverty line also discussed the importance of having aspirations for themselves and for their children. For some, having aspirations that they felt were achievable meant that they did not view themselves as living in poverty as they were able to conceptualise their circumstances as temporary.

I think once I get my qualifications and have a job, I think I'll feel much happier then. I'll feel like I'm doing something good, working hard for my money and setting a good example to my children. My mum and dad always worked when I was younger and I want them to know that [my children] need to get a job.

Female participant, income below poverty line, in-depth interview, London

- Not being able to participate or feel included in society

Some participants believed that being able to participate or feel included in society was a basic need and that its absence is an indicator of poverty. For some, this meant seeing their existence accurately reflected in society and culture and not feeling that parts of public life were out of bounds for them. For others, it was being able to take part in social activities regularly in order to feel that they can participate equally with their peers and not feel that their only needs should be food, water, shelter and heat.

Not having enough to participate. Normal things like go to a cinema once in a while. Engage in the culture of society.

Participant, middle-/higher income group aged 30–59, London

Indeed, for participants living below the poverty line, especially those with children, feeling that they could not afford for their children to participate fully and have the same things as their friends was one of the most difficult aspects of their situation. This was felt to be particularly difficult in winter when free activities such as going to the park were not possible.

Nothing. I don't do anything all day. I just wait to go and pick up my daughter from school... and we sit in because it's cold. In summer we used to go to the park.

Female participant, income below poverty line, in-depth interview, London

- Psychological impact of poverty

The 'experience' of poverty was mentioned by many participants who believed that feelings of hopelessness or depression were important to consider when discussing poverty. They felt that acknowledging how difficult it is for people who are forced to live day-to-day would be essential when considering what society could reasonably expect people experiencing this to do about their situation.

For me, poverty is someone who's got no light at the end of tunnel... there's nothing out there, just living for the sake of it, nothing to look forward to... they've got a roof over their head but they don't want to be there, just getting through today and don't want to think about it.

Participant, low-/middle-income discussion group, Liverpool

- Length of experience

Participants felt that what separated poverty from going through a difficult time was the length of the experience, with most agreeing that poverty described a long-term situation, sometimes throughout generations within a family. They felt that this was crucial in understanding how other aspects of poverty, such as lack of aspiration, opportunity, support and exclusion, came about.

WHAT CAUSES POVERTY?

Introduction

This section explores what participants believed the causes of poverty to be. It looks at a number of causes discussed by participants, and these causes are split into three broad types and the relationship between them explored.

What causes poverty?

Participants put forward numerous causes for poverty. These can broadly be separated into three types:

- 1 Current economic and structural causes;
- 2 Long-term structural causes; and
- 3 Causes relating to individuals, either within or outside their control.

Current economic and structural causes

Participants generally focused on current economic and structural factors in discussions about the causes of poverty in the UK. There were three key reasons for this:

- These were issues that directly related to income and outgoings, and although participants felt there was more to poverty than money, not being able to meet basic needs was viewed as the defining feature.
- As participants believed that poverty had increased since the economic downturn in 2008, it made sense that the causes for this would be related to current economic factors.
- These were also factors that the media was thought to have focused on in recent years, perhaps meaning that participants were better able to make links between these factors and poverty.

Cost of living was mentioned repeatedly in this regard, and particularly by participants living in London. In some ways, this factor was the easiest for participants to relate to as all had felt the impact of rising prices themselves and so could understand how this might affect those living on the lowest incomes. Additionally, as participants viewed poverty as an inability to meet basic needs, they felt that considering how the cost of living had changed, especially in recent years, was important.

Housing costs were cited as a particular problem, and something experienced most acutely by participants in London. All, however, talked about the rise in food prices, especially basic items such as bread and milk as well as increased energy bills. The view was that as incomes have stagnated during the recession, the rising cost of living is what has driven many people into poverty. Indeed, high costs of living and energy costs in particular were discussed as major barriers by participants with incomes below the relative poverty line.

If I wasn't paying so much gas and electric I could afford a better life... be able to buy things like fresh meat – that would make a difference to us.

Male participant, income below poverty line, in-depth interview, London

Lack of available jobs and low-paid or unstable employment were also seen as key causes of poverty. This was felt to be a particular issue for young people leaving education and those nearing retirement age as well as entire populations of some parts of the UK. For instance, in the group discussions in Liverpool, high rates of unemployment locally were often mentioned. Participants stated that this lack of jobs trapped many people in poverty and prevented them from acquiring the means of getting a route out.

This was supported by participants living below the relative poverty line in areas with depressed labour markets who discussed the barriers they faced in trying to find employment due to the number of applications for one position. Additionally, they discussed the knock-on effect of competition for social housing and voluntary positions due to high unemployment rates.

At the moment I'm not even thinking about getting a job, that's impossible here. I'm on a six-month waiting list to volunteer at the library... you have to wait to give your time to someone for nothing but everyone wants to do it so they don't need to sit indoors all day in [the] cold or pay for heating.

Female participant, income below poverty line, in-depth interview, Liverpool

Increasing awareness of in-work poverty in recent years meant that participants also focused on issues that were preventing people who were working from being able to cover their basic needs without needing to claim benefits. Zero-hour contracts were referred to most often during this discussion, possibly as the issue had been covered frequently in the news during the time of fieldwork.

Inability to get a stable job. I feel sorry for school leavers; my son has been in work for two years but it's temporary. Zero-hour contracts are horrendous.

Participant, low-/middle-income discussion group, Liverpool

Welfare cuts were also mentioned by some participants, but were not seen by many as the real cause of poverty. They believed that if stable, well-paid employment were available and the cost of living lower, fewer people would need to rely on welfare in the first place. However, welfare cuts were seen as a cause of poverty in cases where a person who was unable to work because

of ill-health or disability was not being provided with the support needed to meet basic needs.

Cutting support for people who were unable to work [or] couldn't work even if they wanted to causes poverty because they have no choice. The government is saying 'we won't pay for you' but what choice do these people have?

Participant, middle/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Long-term structural causes

These mainly related to the aspirational and opportunity aspects of poverty outlined in section 5. While recent economic conditions were considered to be the greatest causes of poverty, participants, particularly those who were older or lived in areas of high deprivation, were mindful that poverty had existed even during times of economic prosperity.

They felt that the key issue was inter-generational poverty, which meant that some people grew up in poverty and did not expect their lives to be different from those of their parents or grandparents. They felt that this was often exacerbated by living in communities with similar families where children might be less likely to consider a different way of life. This was often described as a mind-set which encouraged poverty to persist.

It's learnt behaviour. There's different goals in life between different people, for the rich people its wanting their kids to be doctors, the poorer people it's just about getting food at the end of the week so that's what they think life is.

Participant, middle-/higher income discussion group, Liverpool

In addition, some participants felt that inter-generational poverty existed because children living in poverty were not getting a good enough education to make finding a well-paid job possible. Education was felt to be the solution for inter-generational poverty as it could provide children living in poverty with the resources and, perhaps more importantly, the aspiration needed to break the cycle.

If your parents are poor and you're poorly educated then you won't have aspirations, you'll think there's nothing there for you.

Participant, middle-/higher income discussion group, Liverpool

Causes relating to individuals

These can be split into two types: causes of poverty that participants believed to be outside an individual's control, such as ill-health or disability, and, decisions made by people which caused them to be poor. A distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor was often used in these discussions and there were often tensions between wanting to support those who were in poverty through no fault of their own and criticism of those who were perceived to have chosen a life in poverty.

Ill-health, disability and caring responsibilities were mentioned by many participants as a cause of poverty and people affected by these issues were

often spoken of with the greatest amount of concern and sympathy. The main reason for this was that participants felt that these people were most likely to be trapped in poverty, with limited choices or opportunities available to them. For this reason, they were considered as being most deserving and most in need of support.

Some people just can't work.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

However, pervading every discussion of poverty was the attitude that many people who may be considered to be living in poverty were nevertheless undeserving of support as they themselves were responsible for their situation. The main subject of these discussions was people who chose not to work or who had the wrong financial priorities, buying luxury goods before essential ones and also getting into debt to fund non-essential spending.

Stories of families who could not afford to buy enough food but would always have new phones and televisions were discussed in every group. The most extreme example of this view was of people living with substance abuse problems who had prioritised their addiction over their basic needs. Although participants were sympathetic in theory to people living with addiction, the issue was still widely viewed as a result of a person's own actions and not something that deserved the support of others.

Drug addicts are in poverty, but they're servicing their habit – they could spend it on something else.

Participant, middle-/higher income discussion group, Liverpool

Although teenage mothers were discussed as a group likely to experience poverty as a result of their own actions, this view only tended to be held by older participants and was not mentioned at all by people under the age of 30. Additionally, family break-ups were not considered by participants as being a serious cause of poverty.

While the idea of the underserving poor created tension in most discussions, it seemed that the deeper attitude was that, in many cases, participants did not really believe that personal actions and choices were the root cause of poverty in the UK. Some participants, typically those who lived in areas of high deprivation, felt that what others might view as poor choices and priorities could be seen as manifestations of the long-term structural and current economic barriers experienced by people living in poverty. If poverty was to be partly defined by a lack of opportunity and aspiration then, they argued, what some may see as poor personal choices were the outcomes of poverty, not the cause:

There's no money, no jobs, services are getting cut all the time. That's what leads to crime, drug addiction, family breakdown. They're the result of poverty, not the cause.

Participant, middle-/higher income discussion group, Liverpool

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Introduction

This section explores some overarching principles to be considered when designing policy to tackle poverty in the UK. It also discusses participants' reactions to five policy ideas generated for the purposes of discussion by the JRF, exploring views on how effective participants thought they would be in reducing poverty as well as how popular the policies would be amongst the public more generally.

What principles are important?

Discussions about tackling poverty suggested that there were a number of key principles that guided participants' views on the likely effectiveness of such policies as well as their desirability. These are outlined below.

1 Focus on the people who need help rather than universal approaches

Policies that were perceived as targeting the people who needed support were viewed as more effective and desirable than ones that could potentially benefit everyone. While suggestions such as reducing the cost of living or increasing the personal tax allowance for everyone were appealing to all participants, they were typically viewed as being unlikely to have a long-term impact on those in poverty and, further, were considered unfeasible due to cost. There was agreement that poverty could only be effectively tackled through highly focused policy solutions, which would have a clear and direct impact on those who need support the most.

Need to get right to the coal face

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

2 Focus on employment

Helping to get people into work combined with making work pay, either by increasing wages or reducing taxes only for those on the lowest incomes was seen as the only long-term solution to poverty. For this to work, however, participants recognised that numerous issues would need to be addressed and both government and employers would have significant roles to play.

If you get people earning their own money and they are able to support themselves then it's good for everyone. Those people will claim less and contribute through direct and indirect taxes, which means that more jobs will be created and the government will have more money to support people who can't work.

Participant, middle-/lower income group aged 30–59, London

3 Carrots are better than sticks

This attitude applied to both individuals and employers. While many participants expressed anger and frustration at the idea of individuals choosing not to work or employers not providing fair opportunities and pay, rewards for either working or offering employees a fair deal were viewed as being more effective in terms of getting people to change their behaviour and less risky than regulation or cutting support. The main reason for this was that participants were concerned about how individuals and businesses might be affected if the government attempted to force them to behave in a certain way and the unintended consequences such as loss of available jobs that might occur as a result.

Removing barriers and ensuring that people are rewarded for doing the right thing is really the only approach that will work.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Policy testing

Overview

Participants were presented with five policy ideas, each designed to tackle poverty in the UK. After group discussion on each, they were asked to cast four votes for the policies which they believed would:

- have the most impact on reducing poverty;
- have the least impact on reducing poverty;
- be the most popular with the public; and
- be the least popular with the public.

The outcome of the voting session is outlined in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Voting outcomes on five policy ideas

Most impact on poverty	Least impact on poverty	Most popular with the public	Least popular with the public
Making work pay	Stop family break-ups	Raise benefits or reduce taxes	Stop family break-ups
Raise benefits or reduce taxes	Reduce people's essential living costs	Get people into work/Making work pay	Reduce people's essential living costs
Get people into work	Get people into work/Making work pay		Get people into work/Raise benefits or reduce taxes
Reduce people's essential living costs		Reduce people's essential living costs	
Stop family break-ups	Raise benefits or reduce taxes	Stop family break-ups	Making work pay

Making work pay

Making work pay

- Raise the minimum wage.
- Use tax breaks to encourage employers to pay staff more.
- Government and employers work together to help low-paid workers get more qualifications and move into better paid jobs.

Policies designed to make work pay were seen as having strong potential for creating a long-term solution for poverty as they would help to create an environment in which people could support themselves in work without having to rely on the state. Such solutions were also felt to be effectively targeted, and designed to benefit the people who needed support, rather than taking a more universal approach.

It's the most targeted; [raising the] minimum wage is aimed purely at people on low incomes and tax breaks [for employers] might create more jobs.

Participant, middle-/lower income group, aged 30–59, London

Increasing the rate at which the national minimum wage is paid or encouraging wider take-up by employers of the living wage, particularly in large cities such as London, were popular ideas with participants. This is because they believed such measures tackled what they saw to be two crucial issues; breaking the benefits trap and ensuring that everyone who works is better off than they would be had they relied on state support alone, and ensuring that people are paid enough by their employer to cover their basic needs without having to claim in-work benefits to top up their income to an acceptable level. Also, it simply meant that people were more likely to be paid fairly for the work they do, something which many participants felt should already be the case.

It's annoying – work should pay in the first place anyway. Work should pay full stop. It shouldn't be a question.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

However, many participants raised concerns about the possible wider consequences of increasing wages. There were concerns about how such policies would affect small businesses, which might struggle to cope with the extra outgoings while still remaining competitive. Also, there was a belief that the economy needs low-paid roles to function and that increasing wage costs may actually oblige employers to either increase the prices of goods and services (thus reducing demand, or reduce the number of jobs, which might actually make the situation worse.

Raising the minimum wage won't help – the companies then have to pay more – because they have to pay more, they need to earn more – all the prices need to go up – leads to inflation. Or, they just hire fewer people.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

Although offering tax breaks to larger businesses was felt to be undesirable to some, particularly older, participants, generally it was felt that this would be a sensible approach which would minimise the risks of job loss and inflation. There was an assumption that these tax breaks could be afforded if the amount spent on benefits, particularly in-work benefits, was reduced accordingly.

If you encourage companies by reducing their NI contributions, that would really work. If fewer people are on benefits then it should balance out.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged over 60, London

The idea of helping low-paid workers get qualifications was popular with older participants, particularly those over 40 who felt that it would help lead to a more skilled workforce. However, younger participants, particularly those aged 30, were less convinced, and did not believe that qualifications and skills necessarily led to better paid jobs, an issue some said they were facing themselves after leaving university

I'm sceptical of how it can definitely equal better paid jobs. If there was a direct correlation between more qualifications and better paid jobs that would be great but doesn't always work like that. It assumes all low-paid workers don't have qualifications.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

However, the overriding concern about these policies was that they would only really benefit those who were already in work or able to get work. Participants did not see how these policies would help people who were unable to work due to ill-health, disability or caring responsibilities; groups that were felt to be most at risk of living in poverty. Additionally, they did not

feel that this would help those in areas of high unemployment where there are simply no jobs to move into.

It only benefits people who are already in work. Not doing anything for those out of work and in poverty.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

Reduce people's essential living costs

Reduce people's essential living costs

- Build more homes that are cheaper to rent by ensuring developers are specifically required to include these when they build.
- Give more tax breaks to private landlords so that they offer cheaper rents and longer term tenancies to people on low incomes.
- Reduce VAT (e.g. to 15%).
- Provide more free childcare.
- Freeze energy prices.

Although the rising cost of living was raised frequently during discussions about the causes of poverty, the idea of tackling poverty by reducing essential living costs such as housing, childcare, energy and VAT were not seen as a viable solution. There seemed to be two main reasons for this.

The first was that participants did not understand how government would be able to implement such policies successfully. These discussions often centred on what they viewed as failed attempts by government in the past to regulate private industry. The energy companies were mentioned as a case in point, with prices being thought to rise continually despite the presence of the regulator, Ofgem.

They'd tried with fuel bills, but then [the energy companies] just raised the prices again.

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Previous reductions in the rate of VAT, specifically when it was reduced to 15% in 2008, were also seen as largely unsuccessful. Many participants perceived that this saving was rarely passed on to the consumer and instead simply resulted in increased profits for businesses. Additionally, there were concerns that cutting VAT would also mean that there would be less money available to provide targeted support for people living in poverty, which could make the situation worse.

It would just make poverty elsewhere, how can they fund more if they're cutting?

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Tackling housing costs by regulating developments and offering tax breaks to landlords were also seen as unfeasible. While participants viewed the high housing costs in London as problematic, they did not believe that

government would be able to find support for such schemes as companies and individuals having the right to use their land and property however they chose. Older participants, typically those over 65, argued that the answer to affordable housing was council housing, and that the Right to Buy scheme had created the current problems, not private developers.

We used to have a solution for this called council houses. Until they sold them off.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged over 60, London

The second reason was that participants simply did not see how these policies would have a significant impact on people living in poverty, given that they would benefit everyone, rather than just those in greatest need. Further, the problems caused by poverty were thought to be so complex that policies like this would only address a small part of what participants thought needed to be done to bring about long-term improvements.

This is looking at a minute corner of the bigger picture.

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Additionally, there were concerns that some of these policies might have a negative impact on other people. For example, participants who rented a property to tenants argued that encouraging landlords to rent to lower income groups would take much-needed housing away from young professionals who could not afford buy their own home.

This excludes a lot of young professionals. I am 30 this year and a lot of my peers can't afford to buy or rent on their own, [so] you have four people sharing a house and they are paying £700 each a month and that is disgusting. This not only doesn't tackle that but will probably make it harder for them to find somewhere, even at that price.

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Raise benefits or reduce taxes

Raise benefits or reduce taxes

- Reduce income tax for low-income households/people who are out of work/people who are in work but still in poverty.
- Let people keep more of the money they earn when they go into work (so take away less of their benefits than happens at the moment), until they earn enough to get out of poverty.

Views on this policy were polarised; participants were typically very negative towards the idea of raising benefits but, conversely, welcomed the suggestion that taxes could be lowered.

With regard to raising benefits or allowing people to keep more of their benefits during their transition into work, participants were generally wary about this. Discussions on it often became quite intense, moving into wider views and concerns about benefit fraud and criticisms of those who chose not to work because they found themselves or believed themselves to be better off on benefits. Further, benefit reform was not seen as a long-term solution to poverty and participants were alarmed at the idea of further changes to what they viewed as being an already complex system.

Participants thought that this would be a very hard policy to 'sell' to the general public, regardless of the concerns mentioned above. In the first instance, this was because they acknowledged the difficulty of engaging the public on the subject of benefit reform; participants stated that there had been so much discussion of it in the media recently that there is a degree of fatigue towards the subject. Second, they felt that the natural consequence of increasing benefits is that taxes have to rise accordingly and they were keen not to have to pay any extra.

I think the problem with the benefit scheme is everyone is a bit cynical about it now. So immediately when anyone says anything about benefits I think, 'no I don't want to pay any more tax'.

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

However, participants were generally very positive about reducing taxes for people on low incomes. This was viewed as a simple, highly targeted solution which would have a material impact upon people who needed it, while clearly encouraging people into work without being punitive.

I think the wrong people get tax cuts. If it goes to the right people then good idea... people will want to work if you give them tax cuts.

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

The only concern relating to reducing taxes for people on low incomes focused on how the lost tax revenue would be replaced. Younger participants, and those aged under 25 in particular, did not believe that the country could afford to lose this income stream and suggested that higher earners and companies should pay more tax to compensate for this.

This concern was not shared by all, however. Indeed, many believed that lowering taxes would encourage more people to move into work rather than living on benefits alone, which would in turn cancel out the lost revenue from taxation. It was believed that this measure would help stimulate the economy more generally, with those on lower wages having more disposable income and therefore leading to increased demand and more jobs.

That will have a knock-on effect as people will spend more money like on flat-screen TVs or whatever. I don't watch TV, or own a TV but that's what people buy, right?

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Despite the popularity of this idea, there was the question of whether allowing some people not to pay tax was unfair on the rest of society, particularly if it led to higher taxes for everyone else. There was also debate as to whether this policy would further weaken the contributory principle.

While not a common view, those who felt this way believed that it was a matter of principle that a working person should pay tax as they would be benefiting from the services that are funded by tax revenue.

Some people are always going to be slightly worse off. If I'm slightly off the cut-off point I would lose out. Is that right?

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Getting people into work

Getting people into work

- Create more part-time and flexible jobs to help people who have children or care for older people to work.
- Give more support to disabled people to help them work and encourage or make employers give more support in the workplace.
- Reduce benefits to encourage more people to work.
- Provide more childcare for pre-school children and encourage more schools to offer before- and after-school clubs and holiday care.

Given participants believed that barriers to employment are a key cause of poverty, it is not surprising that policies to help get people into work were viewed positively. Creating more part-time jobs and jobs offering flexible working hours was felt to be a positive step which could benefit the entire workforce, not just parents and older people. Providing more support to disabled people to help them get and stay in work was also viewed positively.

It would make sense for everyone to have a more flexible system.

Participant, all-income workshop, aged over 60, London

There were some concerns about policy's feasibility. Participants questioned how these roles could be created, and specifically whether it would mean that employers would be encouraged to hire parents, older or disabled people over everyone else, which could risk creating higher unemployment among other groups. Additionally, there was a belief that employers might resist this change and that some might be justified in doing so if flexible working did not suit the industry in which they worked.

With the right industry you could do this but it won't work for every type of job.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Providing more childcare was also welcomed, and it is no surprise that such a measure was most strongly supported by parents who spoke of their own difficulties in combining work and childcare and finding provision that both met their needs and was affordable. Interestingly, participants aged over 65 also endorsed this measure. On probing, it seemed that this was driven by the fact that many of them were an important source of informal childcare

for their grandchildren while their children went out to work, something they had not expected to happen.

While participants were generally very positive about any policy that could create jobs and increase the viability of employment for people, there was very little support for policies that attempted to force people to work by reducing benefits, in spite of the fact that there was common agreement that some do choose to live on state benefits through choice. There seemed to be two main reasons for this. The first was that participants believed that government should provide a safety net for people and that cutting this would not solve the problem of poverty.

Reducing benefits is harsh... I don't agree with that, there needs to be a safety net for people.

Participant, all-income workshop, aged over 60, London

The second reason was that some people may still not be able to work, or might choose not to for good reasons. Specifically, participants with children felt that a parent should be able to decide if and when they work and should not be forced into work by having their benefits reduced.

Stop family break-ups

Stop family break-ups

- Give more couples counselling to stop families breaking down and reform the benefits system to encourage families to stay together.

While the idea of providing more counselling services to families was viewed positively, many participants pointed out that such services were already available through organisations such as Relate, and that in a time of austerity, providing additional counselling should not be a priority.

I'm not averse to counselling itself; I just don't think it's the solution. It's just a waste of resources.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

Reactions were stronger towards reforming the benefits systems in order to encourage couples to stay together. Participants expressed a number of concerns and criticisms about this idea, most of which centred on a belief that the government should not interfere in family life. This was viewed as manipulative by many participants, who believed that it could be dangerous to attempt to use the benefits system to keep families together, particularly as it may mean that people stay in unhealthy or abusive relationships because they would not be able to cope financially if they did not.

I find it manipulative. You're essentially discouraging people from getting out of dangerous relationships. It's not immoral, it's just stupid.

Participant, all-incomes workshop, aged 18–29, London

However, the overarching objection to this policy idea was that it was based on the assumption that poverty was caused by family break-ups. While single mums were mentioned in some discussions as the types of people who were likely to live in poverty, particularly among older groups, few suggested that they were the cause of their poverty, but instead the product of it. Additionally, there was a general feeling that couples of all ages and backgrounds separate, that it was a fact of life and that people should not feel trapped in a relationship simply because they were on a low income.

Although they believed that this was the purpose of the policy, participants did not believe that this idea would help to tackle the cycle of inter-generational poverty. Instead many, especially those who were single parents, or were raised by one, felt very strongly that a single-parent household would be much more likely to create a stable, safe environment for a child than in a couple who stayed together because they couldn't afford to break up.

It's just too focused on traditional family ideals. It doesn't work for me, the whole dysfunctional family thing; I was a much happier child when my parents broke up.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

A wider view was that poverty could only be tackled by addressing the root causes of it, not the results, which was how many viewed relationship breakdowns. They felt that families broke down due to issues such as unemployment, poor housing and debt, and that these were the issues that should be addressed. When it came to relationships, many believed that providing education and guidance to young people would be more effective in encouraging them to have healthy relationships which might prevent them from needing counselling. However, the general view was that the break-up of a relationship is a part of modern life which happens to many types of people.

It's not lack of education, it's just bad luck. It's just life. Paying people to stay together doesn't solve anything.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

HOW DO YOU ENGAGE THE PUBLIC?

Public attitudes towards poverty matter because they inform the level of support people are likely to give to actions, whether they be implemented by government, employers or the voluntary sector. As this report has touched on, the qualitative research we undertook would suggest that there has been something of a softening of public attitudes towards those living in poverty in the UK in comparison with the findings from the qualitative study we ran on the same subject for the JRF in 2007:

- There appear to be greater levels of acceptance that poverty in the UK exists. Previously, participants tended to speak of how in developed countries such as the UK, it is impossible to be truly poor, particularly since the existence of a welfare state means there is a safety net that all can call on when needs be. However, in recent years, attitudes seem to have shifted. In this programme of work, participants discussed the increasing use of food banks, payday lending and homelessness; all issues that, as they saw it, were indicators of the fact that poverty in the UK is a problem.
- As well as being more accepting of the fact that poverty exists in the UK, participants also held more nuanced views about who might be living in poverty. In particular, participants spoke about increasing rates of in-work poverty driven, they suspected, by the increasing use of zero-hours contracts and their perception that wages have not kept pace with the cost of living.
- The idea that there is a cost of living crisis affecting everyone seems to have taken hold; there was broad agreement among participants when speaking of how they struggle to make their wages stretch as far as they once did, and how it is more difficult for them to afford everyday items such as fuel or food. This encouraged participants to consider how precarious life can be for all but the very highest earners; there was a view that most people are only ever one or two financial shocks or significant life changes away from being in poverty, and very few could be considered poverty proof. This encouraged them to be more empathic when thinking about those living below the poverty line.

Apart from the impact of their own financial difficulties on their views, participants were probed on other drivers of their opinions in order to understand the reasoning behind this apparent shift. Many acknowledged that media reporting on subjects such as food bank use has increased which, in part, was thought to account for this shift in attitude. Some, particularly those living in diverse urban areas, reported seeing these problems first hand, which they thought accounted for their greater levels of awareness and sympathy.

Indeed, this shift chimes with findings from the British Social Attitudes survey¹⁸. The data from this source suggests that the public are much less collectivist in terms of their support for extra welfare spending than they were three decades ago: when the question was first asked in 1987, more than half agreed with the statement that the government should spend more money on welfare benefits for the poor, even if it leads to higher taxes. In 2012 this figure had reduced to a third (34% – though this in itself was a six percentage point increase on the previous year, perhaps indicating another change in direction).

That said, some harder views remain. People spoke of how a life in poverty is inevitable for certain types of people – those who grow up in workless households for example, who, they feared, would not have been set a good example about the importance of working as a means of improving one's situation. Some suggested that poverty was simply a result of bad decision-making and as such was the fault of those making these choices.

To help shift these attitudes, and to ensure the public are supportive of anti-poverty strategies, our research would suggest that the four following steps are important to consider.

1 Stop talking about 'poverty'

The word 'poverty' itself is problematic, even among those who think that it is an issue that needs addressing. The word is emotive and, for most, conjures images of those living in absolute poverty in developing countries: it does not speak to them of what they believe the situation in the UK to be. Because of this, when they hear the word 'poverty' applied to UK residents, they tend to assume that the problems are being overstated as a means of getting their attention. This makes people suspicious about what they're being told and causes them to disengage.

The language used in current political debates about poverty does little to capture the public's attention or convince them that this is a cause they should get behind. To illustrate, during the workshop discussion, the content of three speeches or articles about poverty (see Appendix B), written by MPs representing the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat parties respectively, were tested with participants. While participants were typically very quick to correctly identify the party responsible for the speeches, readily recognising the values and arguments put forward, the language used and the way the arguments were framed were quickly dismissed.

For example, an article written by George Osborne and Iain Duncan Smith was seen as being too focused on the problems of individuals and personal choice, ignoring the structural and systematic barriers facing those living in poverty; for instance, low pay and zero-hours contracts. While participants argued that bad decision-making was the reason some live in poverty, it was not thought to account for all cases. This line of reasoning caused participants to disengage; they saw this speech as the government blaming people for their own situation and thereby absolving itself from any responsibility to improve the situation of those facing poverty.

It speaks of the root cause but it doesn't really identify it... really it's about blame... that poverty is about drug addiction, what about access to a good education and to jobs?

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

While participants believed that the Conservatives were focusing on the wrong causes, they felt that, at the least, the party's speech discussed the issue of poverty head-on. In contrast, Labour's speech was felt to be too vague, encompassing too many issues and describing too many different types of people. The lack of a clear narrative or theme behind which participants could rally confused them and left them feeling demotivated.

It's wishy-washy – it's not going to inspire or annoy you. It's sitting on the fence... it's certainly not Tony Benn, that's for sure.

Participant, middle-/lower income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Of the three presented, the Liberal Democrats' speech came closest to expressing the issues caused by and solutions for poverty in a manner that resonated with participants. Indeed, they spoke of how they agreed with the approach of tackling long-term structural causes of poverty and being guided by fairness rather than assigning blame or creating division. However, although the content chimed with their own views, participants were still reluctant to say that they liked it and it seemed that the main reason for this was that regardless of the politician or party, they did not believe it was anything other than rhetoric.

We thought there was a lot of truth in what was being said. At first I thought it was Labour and then I wasn't sure so I kept re-reading and really that's the problem, they all say the same things but use different words to say it and it makes you think that really none of it means anything and that nothing will ever happen. It's just rhetoric.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

This creates a real challenge for any organisation attempting to engage the public on poverty. The term 'poverty' in and of itself lacks meaning for participants and, fuelled by mistrust in official information more generally, the statistics used to measure it are typically disregarded. Further, the manner in which the mainstream political parties tend to speak about the issue does little to engage people; it is either unclear that politicians are referring to poverty when they discuss it or they focus on what are thought to be the wrong issues, blaming individuals rather than looking at structural causes.

Notwithstanding low levels of trust in politicians, when asked what changes would need to be made to communicate messages about poverty more effectively, participants suggested that revising the terminology used would be a good place to start. Instead of talking about poverty, referring instead to 'an inability to meet basic needs' or 'a lack of resources' were thought to be more appropriate terms. It was believed that this could put a distance between what people perceive the experience of poverty to be in the UK and that found in developing countries. Participants said they could more readily conceptualise these terms because of the associations with basic needs such as sustenance, shelter, heating, social capital and social participation, and thus empathise with those who lacked them.

2 Change the measurement

As mentioned previously, the relative poverty measure did little to engage participants. In short, the idea of drawing a line based on income which defined all of those who fell below it as living in poverty felt arbitrary. It served to distract from thinking about what to do to help those living below the line and instead forced people to think about the technicalities, and in particular, where the line had been drawn. Many suggested that the level was set too high, especially given that it was not thought to take regional variations of the cost of living into account.

This aside, few believed that a measure based on income captured what it was like to be in poverty. Indeed, some suggested it rather missed the point, with outgoings being a more pressing matter (especially given the high cost of childcare, the lack of affordable housing and high levels of personal debt) than income. Participants were sensitive to the fact that once data has been measured and collected in one way, it is difficult to then make changes, as comparisons cannot be made. Therefore, some suggested that in addition to measuring relative poverty rates in the UK, there should also be an assessment of the following issues, all of which participants felt provided a better indication as to whether someone is living in poverty or not:

- **An individual's ability to participate in society:** some suggested that being able to participate or feel included in society was a basic need and that its absence is an indicator of poverty. For some, this meant seeing their existence accurately and fairly reflected in society and culture and not feeling that parts of public life were out of bounds for them. For others, it was being able to take part in social activities regularly in order to feel that they can participate equally with their peers.
- **Social capital:** those with strong networks of family or friends, or who lived in a close-knit community, were thought to have better access to informal credit, emotional support and practical help (including, for instance, transport and informal childcare). Participants considered it much less likely that such individuals could be classed as living in poverty – whatever their income might be – as it was believed that their social capital would provide a cushioning effect from the worst impacts of living on a low income.
- **Poverty of aspiration:** many participants felt that those growing up in a workless household or deprived community were less able to consider how they might be able to live a different life when they were older or achieve anything other than that which they had always known. This poverty of aspiration was felt to be as important as someone's income as it was believed to largely dictate the course that person's life and, as a result, whether or not they would be able to get out of poverty on their own. Monitoring this, therefore, would provide an indication as to where resources to help people out of poverty should be targeted.
- **Psychological impact of poverty:** the experience of poverty, believed to be characterised by feelings of hopelessness and depression, were thought to be more important as a marker than the income line. As one participant stated, 'For me, poverty is someone who's got no light at the end of tunnel... there's nothing out there, just living for the sake of it, nothing to look forward to, they've got a roof over their head but they don't want to be there, just getting through today and don't want to think about it'. Indeed, participants suggested that acknowledging how difficult it is for people who are forced to live day-to-day is essential when considering how to change public attitudes, believing that an emotional state is much harder to overcome than a low income alone. Further, they

thought a focus on well-being would be more likely to arouse sympathy and therefore engender support for an anti-poverty strategy.

- **The duration of the experience:** participants drew a line between those having a difficult time, and those living in poverty, suggesting that living on an income that was below the relative poverty line for a short time was markedly different from doing so without respite. Participants believed poverty to be entrenched and to represent a long-term situation. They stated that only by acknowledging this is it possible to engage the public in the wider ramifications caused by poverty, including a lack of aspiration and social exclusion.

Participants suggested that monitoring these issues, alongside the relative poverty measure, would acknowledge just how multi-faceted the experience of poverty is. In turn, they suggested that better understanding these measures would help to more clearly articulate the lived experience of those in poverty and thus engage people in support of an anti-poverty strategy. Indeed, this programme of work showed just how important personal experience is in shaping people's views; those who had seen queues for food banks, or were aware of high levels of deprivation in their area were much more receptive to messages about tackling poverty than those who lived in more affluent areas. Therefore, communicating these factors may help to better conjure a life in poverty for those who have not had such contact with it and help to motivate more positive public attitudes to tackling poverty.

3 Myth-busting on its own won't help change people's minds

Participants acknowledged that talking to people about poverty has also been made more difficult due to the amount of 'noise' that has been generated both in the media and society more broadly around benefit reform. They admitted to feeling tired of hearing about changes to the welfare system and who stands to win or lose. Further, the way the debates on welfare reform have been framed – around deservingness – means that any discussion about an anti-poverty strategy is liable to be side-tracked by this issue.

Participants suggested that the only way to overcome this issue is to confront it. They recognised that the portrayals on popular TV programmes such as *Benefits Street* do not accurately reflect everyone living in poverty; they know that not everyone is living off the state while making no effort to help themselves. However, they do see this as being part of the story and one that it is important to acknowledge – something they do not believe happens at present. They suggested that coverage of people in poverty is binary; those who are poor are either portrayed as being victims (for instance, of circumstance, location, background, the economic crisis) or, much more commonly, as 'scroungers' who are unwilling to help themselves, and there was thought to be very little coverage of all the different types of people in poverty that exist between these two extremes. Given how multi-faceted the experience of poverty is felt to be, media portrayals were thought to be very one-dimensional and lacking in realism, which in turn meant they were not engaging.

Participants urged against communicating the idea that no one ever chooses not to work and therefore ends up in poverty, or to suggest that the public is wrong to think that this is an issue. They suggested that this would simply serve to turn the public off what is being communicated and would result in them not listening at all. Instead, participants suggested that there is

merit in asking people to consider what the root causes of these behaviours are, including inter-generational poverty and a lack of opportunity.

Additionally, they also believed that there could be scope for communicating these issues using a life course narrative to demonstrate how a child living in poverty (which everyone, without question, was believed to be sympathetic to) becomes an adult aged 16+ who is out of work and living on benefits, and who some would argue should have made better life choices. Reminding the public that they're the same person may be a more compelling means of engaging with the public on poverty, rather than simply using case studies that just depict a moment in time.

4 People are open to ambitious solutions

Given that participants' view of poverty is complex and multi-faceted, they suggested that policy responses to tackle it need to reflect this better than they do currently. They believe that governments cannot solve the problem of poverty on their own and, as evidence for this, cite numerous instances of missed targets and failed strategies. The prevailing narrative that the public purse is empty and further cuts are needed has taken hold and as a result, few think the government can do more to help those in poverty, at least not without substantially raising taxes. Instead, employers and the voluntary sector were thought to have a role to play in reducing poverty levels, particularly the former, given the heightened awareness of in-work poverty.

Multi-agency solutions were considered more realistic and likely to succeed, which made them more engaging. Participants expressed a particular interest in hearing about policies that would help ensure a fair economy and wages that were paid at a sufficient level. Indeed, participants warned that a focus on job creation alone would do little to reduce poverty as there was no guarantee that better paid work would naturally follow from this. Instead, they called for collaborative solutions between government and employers such as the implementation of the Living Wage, and offering employers tax breaks to pay it (rather than mandating them to do so). They believed that such measures would help tackle the root causes of poverty and, further, by government and employers working collaboratively, there was a greater chance that these policies would succeed.

This is not a business; it's a society... the morals have to drive the economics. If you have a moral imperative, you're fairer, everything's fairer... it has to be that way round [and] the morals have to be the driver.

Participant, middle-/higher income group workshop, aged 30–59, London

Clearly, communicating with the public about poverty remains a challenge. However, this research points to real signs of hope; there is an appetite to hear about solutions that might help tackle poverty and a willingness to support a good many of these. There is evidence of a more nuanced view of what a life in poverty is like and sympathy for those experiencing its effects. What is missing, however, is a compelling narrative and language with which to engage the public. These principles may help stimulate a constructive debate about poverty with the public and assist in crafting engaging messages that secure public support for an anti-poverty agenda.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sampling and recruitment

The following tables outline the sample for each element of the research.

Table 1: Eight in-depth interviews

Gender	Female	Mix
	Male	
Age	18-24	Mix - at least 2 to be 60
	25-34	
	35-54	
	55-64	
	60+	
Percentile points (covers income and household status)	1-16 (people in poverty, with a h/hold income below 60% of the median)	Mix across percentile points and household composition
Ethnicity	BME	2 minimum
Working status	Working	Mix - at least 2 in work
	Not working	
Voting affiliation	Labour	Mix
	Liberal Democrat	
	Conservative	
	Other	
Area	Inner London borough	2
	Liverpool	3
	Birmingham	3

Table 2: Group A (Liverpool and Birmingham x 2)

Gender	Female	Mix
	Male	
Age	25-39	10
Percentile points (covers income and household status)	31-70 ('squeezed middle')	Mix across percentile points and household composition
Ethnicity	BME	2 minimum
Working status	Working	Mix
	Not working	
Voting intention	Labour	Mix
	Liberal Democrat	
	Conservative	
	Other	
Area	Liverpool	10
	Birmingham	10

Table 3: Group B (Liverpool and Birmingham x 2)

Gender	Female	Mix
	Male	
Age	40-55	10
Percentile points (covers income and household status)	71-89 (comfortable - well off)	Mix across percentile points and household composition
Ethnicity	BME	Mix of ethnicities (no set quota)
Working status	Working	Mix - most working
	Not working	
Voting intention	Labour	Mix
	Liberal Democrat	
	Conservative	
	Other	
Area	Liverpool	10
	Birmingham	10

Table 4: 50-person workshop

Gender	Female	25
	Male	25
Age	18-24	8
	25-34	8
	35-54	16
	55-64	8
	65+	10
Income	Up to £9,499	Min 6
	£9,500 - £17,499	Min 6
	£17,500 - £29,999	Min 6
	£30,000 - £49,999	Min 6
	£50,000 or more	Min 6
Social grade	AB	13
	C1C2	25
	DE	12
Ethnicity	BME	8
Long-term condition / disability	Has a long-term condition or disability	8
Working status	Working	25
	Not working	25
Household composition	Two-parent household	Min 6
	Single-parent household	Min 6
	Couples or part of a couple with no children living at home	Min 6
	Single person with no children living at home	Min 6
Area	Inner London borough	25
	Outer London borough	25
Voting affiliation	Labour	Mix of voting affiliations
	Conservatives	
	Liberal Democrat	
	UKIP	
BSA attitudinal question: Why do you think there are people who live in need?	Unlucky	Mix of responses
	Laziness/lack of power	
	Injustice in society	
	Inevitably part of modern life	

Appendix B: Discussion guides

JRF: Attitudes to Poverty Research: In-depth Interview Guide (Final)

1. Research scope and objectives:

The overall programme of research aims to understand the following:

- What do the public understand poverty to be, how do they define it and what are their attitudes towards the UK definition? Is poverty the best word to describe this?
- What are the public's attitudes towards poverty and how have these been shaped?
- What is the best way to communicate poverty and which messages best overcome the misconceptions?

2. Methodology:

The research consists of the following elements:

- Four x discussion groups in Birmingham and Liverpool;
- Eight x face-to-face in-depth interviews with those living in poverty; and
- One x 50 person workshop in London.

The findings from the discussion groups and in-depth interviews are intended to provide another dimension to the research, supplementing those of the workshop by including participants who live in areas with the highest proportion of workless houses as well as those who are currently living in poverty. The findings will also be used to inform the development of the materials for the workshop.

3. Structure of the discussion

Notes	Guide sections	Guide timings
1 & 2 Introductions and background	Sets the scene, reassures participants about the interview, confidentiality and consent. Discuss the general work and life circumstances of the participant which provides useful background and also establishes a rapport.	5 mins
3. Discussion of their current financial situation	This section outlines their current financial situation and how stable it is. We will also establish whether they think this situation is changeable and whether they think this will change in a year or five years' time.	10 mins
4. Discussion of their environment (home and local area)	This section discusses the participant's home, how they feel about it and whether they believe it fits their needs. It also discusses local area and what they think of it.	10 mins
5. Discussion of support networks available and how they use them	Discusses what services and support networks are used by the family. Then it moves to discuss how important these are and the reasons underpinning this.	10 mins
6. Discussing the impact of their current situation on the time they have	This section covers how the participants spend their time on an average day. It also discusses what they enjoy doing and whether time is spent differently on the weekends. At the end of the section we talk about whether they have enough time to do the things they want or are important.	10 mins
7. Discussion of their well-being	This covers the participant's well-being and establishes how stressed or worried they are at the moment and the drivers of this. It also looks at how their well-being is affecting their decision-making and impacting on their quality of life.	10 mins
8. Conclusions	Identifies key messages and sums up.	5 mins
Total time		1 hour

1. Welcome and introduction	Notes/Comments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank participant for taking part • Introduce self, Ipsos MORI • Confidentiality: reassure that all responses are anonymous and that information about individuals will not be passed on to anyone, including back to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation • Explain outline of the research – commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation to conduct the research. JRF have asked Ipsos MORI to talk to people about what it is like to live in Britain today • Role of Ipsos MORI – independent research organisation (i.e. independent of government), gather all opinions: all opinions valid. Remind that there are no right or wrong answers • Gain consent – check participant understands what we will be discussing, the purpose of the research and what will be done with the findings. Remind them that they can terminate the interview at any time • Get permission to digitally record – transcribe for quotes, no detailed attribution 	<p>Welcome: orientates participant, gets them prepared to take part in the interview</p> <p>Outlines the ‘rules’ of the interview (including those we are required to tell them about under MRS and Data Protection Act guidelines)</p>
2. Intro and background	Notes/Comments
<p>I'd like to start by learning a little about you. Can you just tell me a bit about you and your current household?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who do you live with? • How long have you lived here? • Number of adults in household? • Do you have children? • How old are they? <p>Are you working at the moment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of work do you do? • Do you work full time/part time? • If not working, how do you spend your time? Have you ever worked? Doing what? Why are you no longer working – can you tell me what happened? <p>IF APPLICABLE: What about your partner?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are they working? • What do they do? • Do they work full time/part time? • If not working, have they ever worked? Doing what? Why are they no longer working – can you tell me what happened? 	<p>We ask these questions to confirm the recruitment details and to create rapport/ease the participant into the interview</p>
3. Current financial situation	Notes/Comments
<p>I'd like to start by talking a little about your finances. Can you tell me who is responsible for managing the household budget?</p> <p>How would you describe your approach to your finances?</p> <p>Can you describe your weekly/monthly incomings and outgoings?</p>	<p>This section confirms their current financial situation and whether they think this is likely to change</p>

- How do you keep track of these? Do you keep any records?
- How often do you review your finances?

Do you claim any benefits?

- Can you tell me which benefits you receive?
- Do you deal with each benefit differently?
- If so, why? PROBE: who receives the money from the benefit(s)? How regularly do you receive benefit payments – weekly, monthly? Is it kept separately from the tax credits money?
- Has the size of your benefit(s) claim changed recently? Or what you are eligible to claim? Why is this?
- Do you expect it to change in the near future? Why do you say this?
- How important is the money you receive from your benefit(s)?

How easy/difficult do you find it to manage your incomings/ outgoings?

- What are your priorities – what things do you have to pay for each week/month? Why are these priorities?
- And what are less important payments?
- Are there things that are often difficult to pay for?
- If yes, what are they and how do you pay for them?

Do you find it more difficult to pay for certain things than you did previously?

- IF YES: What kind of things? PROBE – food, utilities, rent/ mortgage, fuel etc.
- How much has the price of these things risen in recent years? What impact has this had on you/your family?

Thinking specifically about how you shop for food, can you tell me:

- How do you decide what to buy and where to go?
- Do you have a fixed idea of what to buy?
- Do you make use of special offers?
- What kind of food do you buy? Is this the kind of food you would ideally buy?

How do you tend to pay for things?

- Cash?
- Debit card?
- Direct debit?
- Credit card?
- Store cards?
- Loans – formal or informal?
- Vouchers/coupons?
- Does this vary from week to week? How?

IF answer YES to loans: **What kind of loan did you take out – probe for formal or informal? Why did you take out the loan?**

- To pay for an expensive one-off purchase?
- To pay your bills?
- Other?

IF answer YES to loans: **How did you decide who to take the loan out with?**

- Cost?
- Recommendation?
- Only option?

More generally, do you have any debts? If so, what kind of debts do you have?

- Credit card payments
- Mortgage
- Catalogue payments
- Instalments
- Arrears on costs
- How much are your debts? Are you planning to pay back these debts? How? And when?

Does your income vary throughout the year? If so, how? And why?

- What impact does this have? Why do you say this?

Has your financial situation changed recently?

- If so, what caused this change?
- How did you respond to it? What changes did you have to make? How did you find this?
- Do you think your financial situation is likely to change in the coming months? Why do you say this?
- Do you think it will get better or worse? What will this mean for your household?

Do you think it is possible to improve your financial situation?

- o If so, how? Why?
- o If not, what is preventing this change?

Where do you think you will be, financially, in a year?

- What about in five years?

If something happened tomorrow – say your boiler broke – and you needed to get it fixed immediately, how easy would it be for you to find the funds to do this if it cost £1,000?

- Where would you get the money from?
- Would you be able to raise the money yourself, or would you need to borrow some? Who would you borrow it from?
- What about if it cost £2,000? Or £3,000? What would happen then? PROBE to try and find the tipping point.

Would you consider taking out a loan if something like this happened?

- What kind?
- Would you consider using a payday loan? Why? Why not?
Have you ever done this in the past?

Have you ever used a pawnbroker or a cash converter service when you've needed money?

- If yes – can you tell me about that? What circumstances were you in? What did you sell? Would you do this again?
- If no – would you consider doing this? Why/why not?

What difference would an additional £25 per week coming into your household make?

- Would you be able to do anything differently?
- Would this change your answer to the previous question about an unexpected expense?

4. Their environment	Notes/Comments
<p>Now we are going to move on and talk about what you think of your home and local area.</p> <p>How did you decide where to live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost? • Always lived in this area? <p>How much of your income is spent on housing costs? Only ask if not established in the previous section.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you feel about this? <p>What is the tenure of your home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have a mortgage? • Social housing? • Privately rented? • Temporary housing? • And how secure do you think your current housing arrangement is? <p>If you had an issue with your home, what would you do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IF privately rented or social housing – how responsive is the landlord or housing association? • IF privately rented – Do you feel able to speak to your landlord about issues with your home? <p>Can you talk me through how you feel about your home?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you like it? Dislike it? Why do you say this? • How much of your income is spent on your home? (if not established in previous section) <p>How many rooms do you have in your home? What are each of these used for? What about outside space?</p> <p>Do you feel you have enough space for the needs of your family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there anything you're unable to do? How do you feel about this? 	<p>Discusses their home and local area and how they feel about it</p>

Are there currently any issues with your home?

- Damp?
- Security issues?
- Heating issues?

Do you see yourself staying in your current home for the foreseeable future?

- Is this through choice or necessity?

And can you tell me a bit about the local area you live in?

- How long have you lived round here? Do you like it?
- What is there for people to do? (young people/teenagers/adults)
- What employment opportunities are there in the local area?
- How safe do you think the area is?
- Is there outside space for people to make use of? Where? Do you use it? Why/why not?
- What are the transport links like? Is it easy to get around? How do you tend to get around your local area? Do you use public transport? Privately owned vehicle?

Do you know many people in your local area?

- Do you have friends or family in the area?
- If yes, how often do you see them?
- How easy is it for you to see them?

Do any of these people provide support or help you out in any way?

- How do they do this? Can you provide me with an example? What kind of difference does this make to you?
- What would your life be like without this kind of help and support?
- Would you say there is a community spirit in your local area?

5. Support

We are now going to talk about the types of services that are available in your local area.

Can you tell me about the services you use, if any?

- Do you use any health services? (health visitors, GPs/clinics, hospitals)
- Do you use any education services? (after-school clubs/schools/further education etc.)
- Do you use any support services in your local community? (childcare providers e.g. Sure Start/nurseries; youth services e.g. youth centres; family support & advice)
- If using childcare ask if parent(s) pay for it.
- What about any advice services? (re services/benefits; Jobcentre Plus, Citizens' Advice, housing advisors, helplines; websites)

How long have you used them? (IF used several, ask of each service)

Notes/Comments

This section establishes what services they use and how important the service is to the family

<p>How much do you use them? (IF used several, ask of each service)</p> <p>What do they do for you? (IF used several, ask of each service)</p> <p>Which services provide the most help/support?</p> <p>How valuable would you say the support they provide you and your family with is?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you do without any of these services? • If you didn't have access to them, what would the impact be? What would you do instead? 	
6. Impact of current situation on time	Notes/Comments
<p>I'd now like to talk to you a little bit about how you spend your time.</p> <p>Can you talk me through an average day for you? (Try to establish if they have any caring responsibilities and what the impact of this is.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the best bits of a typical day for you? • What are the worst bits? • Is an average day on a weekend any different? <p>IF working – What are your working hours? Do you find that these hours impact upon your other responsibilities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they impact on your other responsibilities? • How do you manage this? <p>How do you like spending time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you enjoy doing? • What do you not enjoy doing? • Do you get to do the things you enjoy these days? Why not? <p>Are you happy with the way you end up using your time?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is this? <p>When did you last go out with friends/as a family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you do? What was the impact of this? • How did this make you feel? <p>Do you feel that you have enough time to do the things that you want to do or are important to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think this is? 	<p>This section discusses how participants spend their time</p>
7. Well-being	Notes/Comments
<p>Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about how you feel about certain aspects of your life.</p> <p>How happy are you with your health (how healthy and well you feel)? Why do you say that?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How healthy would you say you are at the moment? • Are you in generally good health? • Do you have any problems with your health? 	<p>This section discusses how participants are currently feeling about aspects of their life</p>

How do you feel about the prospect of the future (life chances/opportunities)? Why do you say that?

- How much do you think about your future?

How happy are you with the amount of choice you have in life? Why do you say that?

- How far do you feel that you have choice?
- How much control do you feel you have of your life?

Do you feel stressed/worried at the moment?

- What has caused this?
- Is this a recent change?

8. Poverty

Lastly, we are interested in understanding how different types of people think about poverty.

How would you describe poverty?

- What is it?
- Who does it affect?
- What words spring to mind?

And what about poverty in the UK specifically? How would you describe it?

- What words come to mind when you think of poverty in the UK?
- Is it different from what we have just been discussing? Why/why not?

Is it right to say that poverty is just about income?

- Why/why not?
- Can you think of any other factors that should be taken into account?
- Why might these be useful in defining poverty?
- Can you think of any issues with measuring poverty using factors other than income?

How do you think people end up in poverty?

Do you think people can get out of poverty? How?

What kinds of things do you normally hear about poverty?

- Where do you hear this? Do you hear about these kinds of things often?
- Have the things you have heard about poverty changed at all in recent years? If yes, how have they changed? Why do you think this is?

Is it important to tell the public about poverty in the UK?

- Why/why not?
- What difference might it make? What would happen if they weren't told?
- What is the best way to tell the public about these issues?

Notes/Comments

Explore participants' views on poverty

<p>Is 'poverty' the right word to describe what we have just been talking about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why/why not? • Is it a helpful term to use or not? • If not, what other words might you use to describe it? Why might this be better? • Would this change how these people are viewed? How? Why do you say this? <p>Over the last five years, who do you think has done well in society and who do you believe has lost out?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is this? • Do you think this is fair? 	<p>Explore participants' views on poverty</p>
9. Conclusions	Notes/Comments
<p>Is there anything that we have not already discussed that you would like to mention?</p> <p>Thank participants; explain the next steps (e.g. what JRF will do with the findings). THANK AND CLOSE. Reassure about confidentiality.</p>	<p>Some key final questions and summing up</p> <p>Draw interview to a close</p>

1. Research scope and objectives:

The overall programme of research aims to understand the following:

- What do the public understand poverty to be, how do they define it and what are their attitudes towards the UK definition? Is poverty the best word to describe this?
- What are the public's attitudes towards poverty and how have these been shaped?
- What is the best way to communicate poverty and which messages best overcome the misconceptions?

2. Methodology:

The research consists of the following elements:

- Four x discussion groups in Birmingham and Liverpool;
- Eight x face-to-face in-depth interviews with those living in poverty; and
- One x 50 person workshop in London.

The findings from the discussion groups and in-depth interviews are intended to provide another dimension to the research, supplementing those of the workshop by including participants who live in areas with the highest proportion of workless houses as well as those who are currently living in poverty. The findings will also be used to inform the development of the materials for the workshop.

3. Structure of the discussion

Notes	Guide sections	Guide timings
1. Introductions and background	Explains the purpose and ground rules for the discussion, and helps to build a rapport by discussing issues participants will find it easy to talk about (e.g. what they do and who they live with)	10 mins
2. What is poverty?	Using tasks and group exercises, this section gathers top-of-mind associations and views on poverty and then focuses on the UK specifically to see whether there is a disconnect between the two	20 mins
3. Poverty in the UK	Asks participants to characterise poverty in the UK in order to understand what types of people they believe poverty affects as well as why they think people experience poverty	20 mins
4. UK poverty measurement and stats	Explains how poverty is measured by the UK government, presents IFS 2011-12 AHC stats and explores how participants react to these	15 mins
5. Is poverty just about income?	Discussion of what other factors might be used to measure poverty	15 mins

We use several conventions to explain to you how this guide will be used, described below.

Questions	Notes and prompts (timing in minutes)
<p>Bold = Question or read out statement: Questions that will be asked to the participant if relevant. Not all questions are asked during fieldwork, based on the moderator's view of progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bullet = prompt: Prompts are not questions – they are there to provide guidance to the moderator if required. CAPITALISED INSTRUCTIONS ARE TO THE MODERATOR IN MANAGING THE GROUP. 	<p>This area is used to summarise what we are discussing, provides informative notes, and some key prompts for the moderator</p>

1. Introductions and background	10 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thank participants for taking part Introduce self, Ipsos MORI – independent research organisation commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Explain aims of project – to explore what people know and think about poverty Explain scope of project – 3 further group discussions, 8 in-depth interviews and a workshop Explain confidentiality and MRS guidelines Get permission to digitally record – transcribe for quotes, no detailed attribution and not passed on to JRF. <p>I'd like to start by understanding more about you. Can you tell me a little bit about...? MODERATOR TO ASK ALL IN TURN:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where you live? Who you live with? How do you spend your time? 	<p>Sets the scene for the research</p> <p>Ensures informed consent</p> <p>Clarifies ground rules</p> <p>Makes people comfortable/confident about participating by putting them at their ease and making sure everyone says something early on</p>
2. What is poverty?	20 mins
<p>Before we begin the discussion, I'd like to do an exercise. In pairs and using the newspapers on the table, I'd like you to take 5 minutes to go through and cut out one or two things that you associate with poverty. It could be an article, picture or advertisement, anything that you feel represents poverty.</p> <p>Moderator – make sure they are comfortable with what they are doing and have what they need, then give them five minutes to complete the task in pairs. Ask each pair to present back to the group and ask the following, writing the key words and issues on a flipchart.</p> <p>Can you describe what you have chosen?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is it about? Why do you feel that it represents poverty? 	<p>Using a task and group exercises, this section gathers top-of-mind associations and views on poverty and then focuses on the UK specifically</p> <p>A broad range of newspapers will be provided for this exercise</p>

Referring to the flipchart:

These are some of the words and issues you've used to describe poverty – what else comes to mind?

- What is it?
- Who does it affect?
- What words spring to mind when you think of poverty?

What about poverty in the UK specifically?

- What words come to mind when you think of poverty in the UK?
- Is it different from what we have just been discussing? Why/why not?

3. Poverty in the UK

20 mins

I'm interested in understanding your views on poverty in the UK in a bit more detail.

What does it mean to be poor in the UK?

How would you describe someone in poverty in the UK? What would they be like?

- What do they do day-to-day?
- Are they employed? What types of jobs would they have?
- Are they claiming benefits? Which ones?
- How old are they?
- What does their household look like? Are they single, do they have a partner, do they have children?
- Where in the country do they live?
- What type of home do they have?

How do you think this individual ended up in this situation?

(Moderator to probe on whether this is something that people see as inter-generational or a result of poor decision-making or behaviours, or whether they are victims of circumstance e.g. the economy. Try to establish what participants think root cause is.)

- How do you feel about these people? Why? **Do you think there are people like this in your local area?**

Asks participants to characterise poverty in the UK in order to understand what types of people they believe poverty affects as well as why they think people experience poverty

M: if group does not believe that poverty exists in the UK, then ask what they think others/govt mean when they discuss poverty

4. UK poverty measurement and stats

15 mins

Can anyone tell me how poverty is calculated in the UK?

If anyone answers:

- What is the calculation?
- Where did you find this out?
- Do you think this is a sensible way to measure poverty?

Explain to group:

Poverty can be defined and measured in various ways. The most commonly used approach is relative income poverty. Each household's income, adjusted for family size, is compared to median income. (The median is the 'middle' income: half of people have more than the median and half have less.)

Explains how poverty is measured by the UK government and presents IFS 2011-12 AHC stats and explores how participants react to these

All based on IFS after housing costs figures

Those with less than 60% of median income are classified as poor. This 'poverty line' is the agreed international measure used throughout the European Union¹⁹.

Does this make sense?

- What do you think about this?
- What do you think the UK median income might be?

In 2011-12²⁰, the relative poverty line for a lone parent with two children aged 5 years and 14 years was £264 per week (£13,765 per year).

- 9.8 million people in poverty – 15.9% of the population
- 1.6m were pensioners – 13.5% of pensioners
- 3.5m of these were children – 27% of children in the UK
- In 2011, two-thirds (66 per cent) of children growing up in poverty live in a family where at least one person works²¹.

What do you think of these statistics?

- Does any of this surprise you? Why/why not?
- From what you know and what we have discussed, do you think that poverty rates are likely to go up or down? Why is that?

5. Is poverty just about income?

15 mins

Is it right to say that poverty is just about income?

Discussion of what other factors might be used to measure poverty

- Why/why not?
- Can you think of any other factors that should be taken into account?
- Why might these be useful in defining poverty?
- Can you think of any issues with measuring poverty using factors other than income?

What kind of things do you normally hear about poverty in the UK?

- Where do you hear this? Do you hear about these kind of things often?
- Have the things you have heard about poverty changed at all in recent years? How have they changed? Why do you think this is?

Is it important to tell the public about poverty in the UK?

- Why/why not?
- What difference might it make? What would happen if they weren't told?
- What is the best way to tell the public about these issues?

Is poverty the right word to describe the people we have been talking about?

- Why/why not?
- Is it a helpful term to use or not?

- If not, what other words might you use to describe them? Why might this be better?
- Would this change how these people are viewed? How? Why do you say this?

Thinking back to the articles/ pictures you chose in the newspapers at the beginning of the group,

- What was it that made you choose them? What was it about them that stood out?
- Do you think you might choose differently if we did the same exercise now? Why/why not?

6. Conclusions

10 mins

Taking account of everything we've discussed this evening, do you think your views on poverty have changed?

Final thoughts about the discussion as well as whether participants' views on the issues have changed

- How?
- What do you think might make people more likely to listen to and engage with these issues?

THANK PARTICIPANTS AND CLOSE DISCUSSION.
HAND OUT INCENTIVES.

Public attitudes towards poverty: Structure for the discussions in the 50-person workshop

10.45–11.30: Session 1: What is poverty?

First things first, it would be good to get to know a bit about you.

- Moderator to introduce themselves and the note taker. Reinforce message about confidentiality. Ask if everyone is clear on what we will be talking about – what poverty is, rather than what causes it.
- Ask participants to tell us their name, where they live, who they live with, what they do... as well as answer “If you weren’t here today, what would you be doing that you’re glad you don’t have to do?”

As the chair mentioned at the start, we’re here to talk about poverty.

What springs to mind when you hear the word ‘poverty’?

- Why do you say this?
- What else do you think about?

Is poverty a problem in the UK?

- What does it mean to be poor in the UK?
- What can/can’t people do if they are poor? Does this matter?
- PROBE for use of food banks, type of housing, whereabouts they live, and quality of life.

Does poverty affect society more broadly, or just the individuals in question?

- Why do you say this?
- How does it affect the rest of society?
- PROBE – injustice, inequality, social unrest, tax yield, benefits bill.

Is there more/less poverty in the UK than there was a few years ago? 20 years ago? Longer than that?

- And do you think the amount of poverty in the UK is increasing or decreasing? Why do you say this?

Is poverty in the UK different from elsewhere in the world?

- Where is it different?
- How is it different?
- Does this mean poverty in the UK is more/less of a problem? Why do you say this?

What other words could be used to describe poverty?

- IF NEEDED, PROMPT WITH WORDS LIKE: FAIRNESS, BREADLINE, NEED ETC.
- Does this mean something different? If so, what? Why do you think this word should be used instead of poverty?

MODERATOR TO HAVE OFFICIAL DEFINITION OF POVERTY AND STATISTICS ON A CARD – can refer to this if needs be, but covered in previous elements of the research.

Bearing in mind everything we have discussed so far, I would like to see what you think to this description of poverty.

MODERATOR TO READ OUT, AND TO HAVE THE BELOW ON CARDS FOR THE GROUP:

Poverty is when someone's resources (especially material resources) are not sufficient for their needs (especially material needs). Whether you have enough resources to meet your needs is affected by several different things including:

- Your income;
- The cost of living (especially of essentials such as food, heating, housing, transport etc.);
- What kind of credit you can access (and what debt you end up with); and
- What kind of services you can get: health, education, childcare, care for older people.

What do you think of this description?

Do you think it captures what it is like to be poor? What is missing?

How would you change this description? Why do you say this? Here are some examples of how politicians talk about poverty:

MODERATOR TO HAND OUT ON CARDS – BREAK PARTICIPANTS INTO THREE SMALLER GROUPS AND ASK EACH TO TAKE ONE CARD AND READ IT THROUGH. ASK PARTICIPANTS TO PAY ATTENTION TO THE LANGUAGE USED. MAKE SURE THAT THE SPEECH REMAINS ANONYMOUS.

1. Nick Clegg, from the 'Strategy for Social Mobility'²²:

Fairness is a fundamental value of this (the Coalition) Government. A fair society is an open society. A society in which everyone is free to flourish and rise. Where birth is never destiny. In Britain today, life chances are narrowed for too many by the circumstances of their birth: the home they're born into, the neighbourhood they grow up in or the jobs their parents do. Patterns of inequality are imprinted from one generation to the next.

The true test of fairness is the distribution of opportunities. That is why improving social mobility is the principal goal of this (the Coalition) Government's social policy. By definition this is a long-term undertaking. There is no magic wand we can wave to see immediate effects.

Nor is there a single moment, or particular age, when the cycles of disadvantage can be broken for everyone. The opportunity gap has to be addressed at every stage in the life cycle, from the Foundation Years through to the world of work. And Government cannot do it alone. Employers, parents, communities and voluntary organisations all have a part to play.

Tackling the financial deficit is our (the Coalition's) most immediate task. But tackling the opportunity deficit – creating an open, socially mobile society – is our guiding purpose.

2. An (edited) article by George Osborne and Iain Duncan Smith in the Guardian²³

Tackling child poverty is, and always will be, a priority for us (Conservatives) – and at the heart of our welfare reforms is the commitment to transform the lives of the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society. Central to our approach is the conviction that it is not enough only to tackle the symptoms of poverty without also tackling the underlying causes.

Today, with the launch of a new Child Poverty Strategy, we restate our commitment to tackling poverty at its source – be it worklessness, family breakdown, educational failure, addiction, or debt. These are the problems that blight the lives of vulnerable families and the strategy draws together the action we are taking on all these fronts.

Using the main measure set by the last (Labour) government, child poverty is down by 300,000 since 2010. But we are not satisfied with measuring our achievement simply by how many children are moved from one side of an arbitrary line to the other.

For far too long, a fixation on relative income led the last government to chase an ever elusive poverty target, spending unprecedented amounts on benefits and almost £170 billion on tax credits as they tried to move poor families over the line. But it did not deal with the difficult issues. And in the process, Labour lost sight of the very people they were trying to help – leaving millions trapped on benefits, but without tackling the root causes of why they found themselves in poverty in the first place.

The truth is that children living with parents who are still drug addicted or long-term workless will never truly be lifted out of poverty by just giving them a few pounds more a week in benefits to hit a particular statistical measure.

3. Ed Miliband, speech on the cost of living crisis to the Resolution Foundation (edited²⁴)

The 21st century inequality, the fairness divide in our economy, threatens to be about a division between the richest at the top who have been doing well, and the majority – lower and middle-income – who have been struggling to keep up: working harder for longer for less. The result is a quiet crisis that is unfolding day-by-day in kitchens and living rooms in every town, village and city up and down this country. The root causes lie in long-term changes in our economy. Over the last few decades, less of what our economy produces has been paid out in wages – and more in profits. But this is only part of the story. There has also been growing inequality in earnings. Since the late 1970s wages have grown almost twice as fast for the top 10% as they have for those in the middle.

Our economy has become progressively less fair and the losers have been those on middle and low incomes. And with that unfairness has come instability in our economy.

Walk down any street: behind those front doors families are anxious about how they will get by over the next few years. Squeezed wages, squeezed prospects, squeezed aspirations.

That is why the British Promise, that the next generation would always do better than the last, is now under threat like never before. The central task is to build a different sort of economy; with prosperity rooted in high-productivity, high-skill industries, creating quality jobs and a better quality of life.

Finally, we need to recognise that fairness is not just financial. Because the impact of the soaring cost of living for many people is not just felt in a more expensive weekly shop or at the petrol pump, it's also felt in the pressure to work harder for longer, see their family less, and to borrow more, sometimes at exorbitant rates. We need to recognise that for all of us, but particularly those families in the eye of the storm, there are aspirations beyond the bottom line.

MODERATOR TO ASK EACH MINI-GROUP TO DISCUSS:

- What did you think about what you just read? What stood out? Was there anything you particularly liked? Disliked?
- What did you think about the words they used to describe poverty – what do you understand by them? Would you use those words? Why/why not?

- Which political party do you think gave this speech? Why do you say that?
- Is this what you'd expect to hear on poverty from Conservative/Labour/Liberal Democrats? Why do you say this? How does this make you feel?

MODERATOR TO THEN ASK THE GROUP TO NOMINATE SOMEONE TO FEED BACK. WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE CONSENSUS VIEW FROM THE TABLE IS – BUT ALSO WHERE THE DIFFERENCE LIES. WANT THEM TO TELL THE OTHERS WHAT THEY THINK ON THE QUESTION BELOW – MENTION THAT THEY WILL NEED TO REPORT THIS BACK TO THE WHOLE GROUP IN THE NEXT SESSION:

- What poverty in the UK is – what does it mean to them?
- Whether it is a problem.

NOTE TAKER TO MAKE SURE THESE SUMMARIES ARE CAPTURED.

11.30–11.45: Plenary

- Chair to run the session and to go through each table in turn asking for feedback and responses to the key questions above:
 - What poverty in the UK is – what does it mean to them?
 - Whether it is a problem.
- Ask the other tables what they think – show of hands for agreement.
- Chair to introduce the next section – to talk about what causes poverty.
- But first a quick break – indicate where the coffee is, but ask that everyone is back to begin the discussions by mid-day.

11:45–12: BREAK

11.45–13.00: Session 2: Why does poverty happen?

MODERATOR TO EXPLAIN THAT IT IS LIKELY THAT WE WILL HAVE TOUCHED ON SOME OF THESE ISSUES IN THE FIRST SESSION – NOW GOING TO GO INTO THEM IN MORE DETAIL.

What does it feel like to be poor do you think? Why do you say this?

- PROBE for stigma, whether this is something they have considered.
- Who is poor in the UK?
- Why are these people poor?
- PROBE on choice versus circumstance.

MODERATOR TO DIVIDE GROUP INTO THREE SMALLER GROUPS AND ASK THEM TO EACH TAKE A CASE STUDY OF A PENSIONER, A FAMILY AND A LONE ADULT LIVING IN POVERTY. IN THEIR SMALL GROUPS ASK THEM TO WORK THROUGH THE CASE STUDY DISCUSSING:

- Whether they expected these kinds of people to be in poverty
- The impact on them being in poverty – what can/can't they do? How might this affect them?
- What surprised them about this case study. PROBE on income levels – moderator to refer to official definition if needs be.

ASK EACH SMALL GROUP TO PRESENT BACK TO THE REST THE KEY DETAILS FROM THEIR CASE STUDY AND THE ISSUES RAISED BY THEIR GROUP.

Once they have been through them all, ask:

- Which of these case studies stood out most for you? Why was this?
- How did these case studies make you feel about poverty in the UK today?
- Does information like this make you feel that something should be done about poverty in the UK?
- IF YES – why do you say this?
- IF NO – what would you need to hear, if anything?

MODERATOR TO EXPLAIN THAT NOW GOING TO DISCUSS THE CAUSES OF POVERTY. MODERATOR WILL HAND OUT A PACK OF SORT CARDS WITH KEY WORDS INCLUDING:

- Family break-up
- Inter-generational poverty, e.g. if your parents were poor
- Low-paid and unstable employment
- Drug addiction
- Choosing not to work
- Rising cost of living
- Part of the country in which you live
- People lack aspirations to improve themselves
- Welfare cuts
- Ill-health/disability
- No jobs available
- Caring responsibilities – for older and/or younger people
- People living beyond their means
- Children living in poverty are not getting a good education

MODERATOR TO BREAK GROUP INTO TWO – EACH SMALL GROUP TO HAVE A PACK OF SORT CARDS. ASK THEM TO DEBATE AND BRAINSTORM (USING FLIPCHARTS AND POST-ITS AND POSSIBLY TEMPLATES) HOW THIS IS RELATED TO POVERTY, AND HOW THEY WOULD RANK IT (I.E. WHICH IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CAUSE OF POVERTY AND WHICH IS THE LEAST). NOTE TAKER TO GO WITH ONE GROUP, THE MODERATOR THE OTHER.

MODERATOR TO TRY AND TEASE OUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE STRENGTH OF ASSOCIATION (e.g. it's likely that if your mum is a heroin addict and has no job, you're poor) AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIETY (e.g. large numbers of minimum wage jobs causes people to be poor).

AFTER 15 MINUTES EACH GROUP TO PRESENT BACK WHAT THEY HAVE DISCUSSED.

Based on everything we have discussed so far would you say that...

- Poverty is inevitable?
- There will always be poverty in the UK?
- Poverty is something that can be reduced?

- The government should make cutting poverty a top priority?
- Poverty is mainly due to people's personal choices and should be left to individuals and families to solve?

CHAIR TO THANK PARTICIPANTS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS SO FAR, TELL THEM WHERE LUNCH IS BEING SERVED AND THAT DISCUSSIONS START AGAIN AT 13:45.

ALSO ALERT PARTICIPANTS TO COMMENT WALLS WHERE THEY CAN LEAVE THEIR RESPONSES ABOUT THE DISCUSSIONS.

13.00–13.45 – Lunch

13.45–14.00: Plenary

- Chair to welcome everyone back after lunch – make sure everyone is sitting at the tables they were at before lunch.
- Chair to explain that now going to move on to more positive discussions – different policies that might have an impact on poverty in the UK.
- Chair to explain that there are five stations around the room and that each of the groups will move between them debating the policies in turn.
- They'll get about 15 minutes at each – they're going to be on their feet, let us know if you get tired!
- Please be as open-minded and responsive as you can – we're more interested in the principles of the idea and the potential it has rather than the detail.
- Explain that they'll be going round with the moderators, but that the note takers will stay at one of the stations for the afternoon so they can compare and contrast responses across the group.
- Highlight the five policy responses and tell each group where they are starting.

14.00–15.30: Session 3: Testing possible policy solutions

EACH GROUP TO HAVE ABOUT 15 MINUTES AT EACH STATION. CHAIR TO CIRCULATE AND TO KEEP EVERYONE TO TIME.

MODERATOR TO TAKE EACH GROUP TO THEIR FIRST STATION. READ OUT WHAT IS ON THE FLIPCHART.

Please can you spend the first few minutes putting Post-It notes on the flipchart highlighting your spontaneous responses to this policy. Once they have done this, ask them:

- Why have you said this?
- Do others agree/disagree?

Do you think this policy would help reduce poverty?

- Why do you say this?
- How do you think it would reduce poverty?

Who would benefit from this policy?

- What do you think about this? Are these the kinds of people who should be targeted?
- Are there any groups that would not benefit? Does this matter?
- Would anyone be disadvantaged further still? Why do you say this?
- Is it economically beneficial to introduce this policy? What impact would this have?

How feasible do you think this is?

- How costly would it be?
- How difficult would it be to set up and run?
- Which political party would be likely to support this policy? Why do you say this?
- How quickly would it have an impact? Is this quick enough?
- Is it morally right to implement this policy?
- Why do you say this?
- Where appropriate, probe about state interference into private lives.

MODERATOR NOTE: If participants are struggling, or they are all agreeing, try the exercise below.

BREAK PARTICIPANTS INTO TWO GROUPS. ASK ONE GROUP TO PUT TOGETHER AN ARGUMENT FOR THE POLICY AND THE OTHER AGAINST. ASK THEM TO SUM UP THEIR RESPONSES ON A PRE- PREPARED TEMPLATE AND THEN PRESENT BACK TO EACH OTHER.

GROUP THEN VOTES FOR/AGAINST EACH POLICY TO SEE WHETHER IN FAVOUR OF IT.

15.30–15.45: Voting session

AT ORIGINAL TABLES

Moderator to explain that now want to get participants to make a few choices and to consider in more detail the things we have been discussing.

Participants will be given different coloured stickers and will be asked to place these on the solutions they feel:

- **Green sticker:** Will have the most impact on reducing poverty
- **Blue sticker:** Will be the most popular or readily accepted by the general public
- **Yellow sticker:** Will have the least impact on reducing poverty
- **Red sticker:** Will be the least popular or unlikely to be accepted by the general public

During this time the chair will circulate the room, making a tally of the votes so the overall figures which can be presented in the final plenary.

AFTER THE VOTING MODERATOR TO ASSEMBLE GROUP ROUND THE ORIGINAL TABLES.

How easy did you find this exercise?

- Why do you say this?

- Which vote was hardest to cast?
- Why do you think this was the case?

15.45–16.15: Session 4: How should we view poverty?

Now we've been talking a lot about different policy options for tackling poverty. I'd like to ask you one last question on this – do you think that, as a society, we should do anything at all to tackle poverty?

- MODERATOR TO ASK FOR A QUICK SHOW OF HANDS – YES VERSUS NO.
- IF YES – why should we do something? Should we do something for everyone in poverty? Or just some people? Why do you say this?
- IF NO – why do you think this?
- What do you think the impact of not doing anything would be? Would this matter?

Whose responsibility is it to help people in poverty?

- Probe on individuals themselves, society as a whole, government, charities, and employers
- Why do you say this?

What kind of arguments do you think would most encourage people to act on poverty?

- Of everything you have heard today about people living in poverty, what has stood out most for you?
- Why do you say this – what is it that makes that issue so striking?

If you were trying to persuade someone else that poverty is a problem in the UK what would you tell them?

- Why do you say this?
- Would this be enough to get them to support interventions designed to reduce levels of poverty in the UK, like the ones we discussed earlier?
- What's stopping people from supporting measures that tackle poverty? Why do you think this is?
- What do you think people would have to hear to support these kinds of measures? PROBE moral versus economic arguments.
- What would they need to see?
- How do you think these messages should be communicated? Whose responsibility is it to do this?
- What else would need to change in order that people are more likely to support measures to tackle poverty?
- What would a low/no poverty UK be like, do you think?
- Is there anything else that you would like to mention?
- Moderator to wrap up, and thank everyone on the table for their time.

16:15–16.30: Plenary

WHILE THE CHAIR IS PRESENTING, MODERATORS AND NOTE TAKERS
TO HAND OUT INCENTIVES, INCENTIVE SHEET AND FEEDBACK FORMS.

- Chair to welcome participants to the final plenary.
- Chair to present findings from the voting exercises:
 - Policy most likely to reduce poverty
 - Policy least likely to reduce poverty
 - Most popular policy
 - Least popular policy.
- Chair to ask whether or not anyone would like to comment on these scores. Chair to hand over to JRF.
- JRF to speak to participants for a few minutes about the project and what they are planning to do next.
- Chair to thank participants for their time; hope they have had an enjoyable day – free to go!

NOTES

- 1 www.jrf.org.uk/work/poverty
- 2 www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-definitions.pdf
- 3 www.jrf.org.uk/work/poverty
- 4 Castell, S & Thompson, J. (2007). *Understanding Attitudes to Poverty in the UK: Getting the public's attention*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 5 ONS (2013). Statistical Bulletin: Workless Households for Regions across the UK, 2012. 4 Sep 2013 [online]. www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_326396.pdf [accessed 8 Aug 2014].
- 6 Hanley, T. (2009). *Engaging Public Support for Eradicating UK Poverty*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 7 *ibid.*
- 8 Park, A., Phillips, M. & Robinson, C. (2007). *Attitudes to poverty: Findings from the British Social Attitudes Survey*. London: NatCen.
- 9 Castell, S. & Thompson, J. (2007). *Understanding Attitudes to Poverty in the UK: Getting the public's attention*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 10 Clery, E., Lee, L. & Kunz, S. (2013). *Public Attitudes to Poverty and Welfare, 1983–2011*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 11 *ibid.*
- 12 Park, A., Bryson, C., Clery, E., Curtice, J. & Phillips, M. (2013). *British Social Attitudes 30*. P.13 London: NatCen.
- 13 Curtice, J. (2010), 'Thermostat or weathervane? Public reactions to spending and redistribution under New Labour', in Park, A., Curtice, J., Thomson, K., Phillips, M., Clery, E. and Butt, S. (eds.), *British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report*, London: Sage and Stuart, N. and Wlezien, C. (2005), 'Opinion-Policy Dynamics: Public Preferences and Public Expenditure in the United Kingdom', *British Journal of Political Science*, 35: 665–689
- 14 Park et al (2013). *British Social Attitudes 30*. London: NatCen.
- 15 Bamfield, L. & Horton, T. (2009). *Understanding attitudes to tackling economic inequality*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- 16 This is defined as households with an income below the 60 per cent threshold after housing costs.
- 17 All examples were drawn from Cribb, J., Hood, A., Joyce, R. & Phillips, D. (2013). *Living Standards, Poverty and Inequality in the UK: 2013 IFS Report R18*. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies. At www.ifs.org.uk/comms/r81.pdf [accessed 8 Aug 2014].
- 18 Park et al (2013). *British Social Attitudes 30*. London: NatCen.
- 19 www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/poverty-definitions.pdf
- 20 www.ifs.org.uk/comms/r81.pdf

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- 21 www.cpag.org.uk/child-poverty-facts-and-figures
 - 22 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61964/opening-doors-breaking-barriers.pdf
 - 23 www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/26/conservative-child-poverty-strategy-george-osborne-iaian-duncan-smith
 - 24 www.labour.org.uk/the-cost-of-living-crisis-facing-britain--Ed-Miliband

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

About Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute

The Social Research Institute works closely with national government, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its 200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of the specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methodological and communications expertise, ensures that our research makes a difference for decision-makers and communities.

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