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Title: **A Basic Income is feasible: but what do we mean by 'feasible'?**

Abstract

The paper will describe a variety of different feasibilities, mainly in the context of the UK, but also more generally, and will then ask whether a Basic Income is feasible in each of the senses discussed below by tackling relevant questions:

- financial (Would it be possible to finance a Basic Income? Would implementation impose substantial financial losses on any households or individuals?)
- psychological (Is the idea readily understood, and understood to be beneficial?)
- institutional (Would it be possible to administer a BI? Would it be possible to manage the transition?)
- political (Would the idea cohere with existing political ideologies? Would the political process be able to process the idea to implementation?)
- behavioural (Will a Basic Income work for households and individuals once it's implemented?)
- etc.;

Where arguments against feasibility are discovered then the paper will ask whether it might be possible to formulate and then implement strategies to turn non-feasibility to feasibility.

An important question to discuss will be whether the feasibilities are 1. additive, 2. conjunctive, or 3. disjunctive: that is, 1. will the strength of each feasibility contribute to the strength of a more generalized feasibility? 2. will the strength of the feasibility with the least strength determine the strength of a more general feasibility? or 3. will the strength of the strongest feasibility determine the strength of a more general feasibility? (Analogies: 1. a tug of war is additive; 2. a relay race is conjunctive; and 3. a pub quiz is disjunctive.)

The paper will draw conclusions about a Basic Income's feasibility.

Introduction

'Is a Basic Income ¹ feasible?' Here 'feasible' means 'capable of being done, effected, or accomplished'. ² So the question that we are asking here is this: Is a Basic Income capable of being legislated and implemented? But in order to ask that question, we shall first of all need to provide a context, and secondly we shall need to break the question down into a series of related questions. The context in view here is the UK. A Basic Income of particular specified levels for different age groups might be feasible in Canada but not in the UK, or vice versa. And in order to answer the general question 'Is a Basic Income feasible in the UK?' we shall have to ask such questions as 'Is a Basic Income financially feasible?' and 'Is a Basic Income politically feasible?' - and that latter question will itself need to be broken down into two separate questions: 'Does a Basic Income cohere with the ideological positions of the UK's major political parties?' - and 'Given the way in which social policy achieves implementation in the UK, is it possible that a Basic Income might be implemented?'

¹ For the purposes of this paper I use the term 'Basic Income' to refer to an unconditional and nonwithdrawable income for every individual as a right of citizenship. In a UK context I prefer the term 'Citizen's Income', because in English English the word 'basic' carries connotations of less desirability (as in the Sainsbury's cheaper 'basics' range) and the UK Government has referred to its means-tested Universal Credit as a 'basic income'. But the BIEN congress is in Canada, and the audience is an international one, so on balance 'Basic Income' is probably the most appropriate term in this context.

² www.dictionary.reference.com

Financial feasibility

The obvious answer to the question ‘Would a Basic Income be financially feasible?’ is of course ‘yes’ if we mean by the question ‘Could a Basic Income be funded by reducing tax allowances and means-tested and contributory benefits?’ A revenue-neutral Basic Income would be possible if the Basic Income was constructed in that way. The Citizen’s Income Trust has shown that for the financial year 2012-13 a Basic Income of £71 per week for adults over 25 years of age, £56.25 for 16 to 24 year olds, and £142.70 for pensioners, could have been paid for by reducing tax allowances and means-tested and contributory benefits.³

The concept of financial feasibility might also relate to the number of individuals who would suffer significant losses if a revenue neutral Basic Income were to be implemented. We might somewhat arbitrarily decide that feasibility in this sense might be defined as: ‘No more than 5% of individuals should suffer a loss of disposable income of more than 15%, and no more than 10% of individuals should suffer a loss of disposable income of more than 10%.’⁴

By using the EUROMOD computer programme and Family Resource Survey data, we can discover the gains and losses that would be experienced by a 0.1% sample of the UK population if a specified benefits reform were to be implemented. The most recent data available is for 2009, and for that year a Basic Income of £40 for every individual from age 0 to retirement age, and of £100 for every individual over retirement age, with the Basic Income paid for by reducing tax allowances and means-tested and contributory benefits and by adjusting Income Tax and National Insurance Contribution rates slightly, can be shown to have been financially feasible in relation to the losses thresholds defined above.⁵

Basic Incomes of different levels, and paid for by different adjustments to tax thresholds, tax rates, and means-tested and contributory benefits, would deliver different patterns of gains and losses, and further research in this area would be useful. But having said that, we should not be overly concerned about losses of 10%. A household that suffers a loss in means-tested benefits of that magnitude will generally find it very difficult to make up that loss. If we assume a household loss of £10 per week, a Universal Credit taper rate of 65%, and National Insurance Contributions of 11%, then additional earnings of about £40 per week will be required to deliver the necessary additional £10 of net income. With a Basic Income the situation is very different. The Basic Income would not be withdrawn, but Income Tax (at say 25%) would be payable on all or most earned income. A household loss of £10 per week could be made up by earning an additional £14 per week. It would therefore be far easier for a household to make up losses at the point of implementation of a Basic Income than it is in relation to losses imposed by changes in means-tested benefits regulations.

So in relation to revenue neutrality, and in relation to households’ ability to handle losses at the point of implementation, a Basic Income scheme could be designed that would be financially feasible.

Psychological feasibility

There are some public policy fields in which public opinion plays only a small part in policy-making:⁶ but in the benefits sphere public opinion matters, and in the UK it might be in relation to the public mindset that a Basic Income will be less feasible than in relation to any of the other feasibility types.

³ Citizen’s Income Trust (2013) *Citizen’s Income: A brief introduction*, London: Citizen’s Income Trust. www.citizensincome.org

⁴ Malcolm Torry (2012) ‘Research note: A Citizen’s Income scheme’s winners and losers’, *Citizen’s Income Newsletter*, issue 3 for 2012, p 2

⁵ Malcolm Torry (2012) pp 2-4

⁶ Cf. Richardson, J.J. (1969) *The Policy-Making Process*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, about the Restrictive Trade Practices Act 1956. The general public was largely unaware of the effects of the ways in which trade associations policed resale price maintenance. The motive for change was the UK Government’s need to make the economy more efficient.

My experience of explaining a Basic Income to groups of intelligent people is that, at the beginning of the conversation, at the forefront of people's minds, are such understandable presuppositions as 'to reduce poverty we need to give more money to the poor', 'to reduce inequality we need to give more money to the poor', 'if you give more money to the poor then they might not work', 'the rich don't need benefits'.

I might draw the group's attention to Child Benefit. This gives the same amount of money to every family with the same number of children, *and* it reduces poverty because it provides additional income for families with the lowest incomes, *and* it reduces inequality because it constitutes a higher proportion of total income for those with low incomes than it does for those with high incomes. Child Benefit provides additional income for those with the lowest incomes, but because it is not withdrawn as earned income rises, it does not act as an employment disincentive and so is more likely to encourage additional gainful employment than means-tested benefits do. The wealthy pay more in Income Tax than they receive in Child Benefit, so it hardly matters that they receive Child Benefit: and it's better that they do receive it because to give the benefit to every family with children is administratively efficient. I might also draw the group's attention to means-tested benefits. These give more to the poor than to the rich, but because the benefits are withdrawn as earnings rise they prevent families from earning their way out of poverty, they make it less likely that people will seek gainful employment, and they therefore tend to increase inequality.

When I suggest that the intentions behind the group's presuppositions are better served by Child Benefit than by means-tested benefits, and that a Basic Income would also serve those intentions better than means-tested benefits currently do, I can see the penny drop for some of the group's members. They have understood. But by the end of the session there will still be some members of the group who cannot see beyond the idea that if the poor need more money then means-testing is the obvious way to make sure that they get the money that they need.

The presuppositions are so difficult to shake off because we have lived with them for so long. Since Elizabeth times we have operated means tests, with the State giving more to the poor than to the rich and then withdrawing benefits as other income rises. Four centuries ago this might have been the only option, but, in the context of a progressive tax system, unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefits are the administratively efficient way to provide those with low incomes with additional income, and at the same time to ensure that they experience no employment disincentives.

The question for us here is this: Is it possible to shift the public mindset? Is it possible that sufficient numbers of people will understand that in the context of a progressive tax system a universal benefit is a more constructive way of targeting money on the poor than means-testing will ever be? – that universal benefits make people more likely to work, and not less? – that the tax system takes far more from the wealthy than they receive in universal benefits, so it's no problem that they receive benefits along with everybody else?

Since William James wrote *The Varieties of Religious Experience* we have known quite a lot about individual conversion experiences, both religious and otherwise;⁷ and, more relevantly, Serge Moscovici, has shown how a minority within a group can convert the majority to their viewpoint:

A minority, which by definition expresses a deviant judgment, a judgment contrary to the norms respected by the social group, convinces some members of the group, who may accept its judgment in private. They will be reluctant to do so publicly, however, either for fear of

⁷ James, William (2012) *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A study in human nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, first published 1902; cf Sargant, William (1976) *Battle for the Mind: A physiology of conversion and brain-washing*, London: Heinemann

losing face or to avoid the risk of speaking or acting in a deviant fashion in the presence of others.⁸

If individual but unexpressed conversions then occur, public compliance with the view expressed by the majority can for a long time coexist with an increasing minority thinking differently. Then one act of courage can reveal how opinion is shifting; and a snowball effect can then occur because

a consistent minority can exert an influence to the same extent as a consistent majority, and ... the former will generally have a greater effect on a deeper level, while the latter often has less, or none, at that level.⁹

Moscovici's research related to groups and institutions, and we ought not to assume that a whole society will function in the same way: but the UK's recent experience of a rapid shift of public opinion towards same sex marriage suggests that the same process might also occur on a societal level. That particular transition might be informative, particularly in relation to the incremental practical steps by which it occurred. Within just sixty years the UK has seen the decriminalization of homosexual activity, anti-discrimination legislation, equalities legislation, civil partnerships, and now same sex marriage. The same process occurred with equalities legislation generally. Starting with the Race Discrimination Act in 1965 and the Equal Pay Act in 1970, the UK Government has legislated for various equalities when doing so has been somewhat ahead of public opinion. Each legislative step changed public behaviour and propelled an already changing public opinion more quickly along its trajectory and thus prepared the ground for the next legislative step that was slightly ahead of public opinion. The public opinion trajectory was always clear, so although it might have looked as if the Government was taking a risk, in fact it wasn't.

There are loud voices opposed to universal benefits, including the press. This is why party leaders feel a need to express opposition to universal benefits, and why during a speech made on the 6th June 2013 Ed Miliband MP said that 'it doesn't make sense to continue sending a cheque every year for Winter Fuel Allowance to the richest pensioners in the country'.¹⁰ However, the silent majority know both how efficient Child Benefit is and how well it serves those on the lowest incomes. Households containing children, and with at least one adult paying higher rate tax, would now appreciate not having the value of Children Benefit withdrawn through the tax system. There might therefore be a silent majority in favour of universal benefits, but perhaps not knowing that they are.

The only way to test this would be for the Government to argue for turning means-tested benefits into a new universal benefit and then to make the change: preferably for a group within society that the majority could regard as deserving in some way, so that the experiment becomes a test of public appreciation of universal benefits rather than a test of public attitudes towards groups within society.

There is a precedent. It was a slow and somewhat fraught process, but during the 1970s Family Allowance for every child except the first in each family became Child Benefit: an unconditional benefit for every child. The mechanism by which the change occurred is that Child Tax Allowances were abolished and Family Allowance was extended to the first child in each family. Effectively, a tax allowance became a new universal benefit. The change was achieved with almost no public opposition.¹¹

¹¹ There is therefore no reason for not making similar attempts, and every reason for doing so.

Groups regarded by the public as deserving and for whom the Government might therefore attempt transitions from tax allowances and means-tested benefits to unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefits might be young adults and pre-retirement working age adults (perhaps with National

⁸ Moscovici, Serge (1980) 'Toward a Theory of Conversion Behavior', pp 209-239 in Berkowitz, Leonard (ed.) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol 13, New York: Academic Press, p 211

⁹ Moscovici, Serge (1980) pp 214-16

¹⁰ www.labour.gov.uk/one-nation-social-security-reform-miliband-speech#

¹¹ Torry, Malcolm (2013) *Money for Everyone: Why we need a Citizen's Income*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp 22-5

Insurance contribution records functioning as a gateway for the latter group, as they will do for the new Single-Tier State Pension).

My hunch is that we would see the same process as we have seen for same sex marriage, and that the popularity of the changes for young adults and for pre-retirement adults would reveal and embed a public opinion shifting towards understanding the advantages of universal, unconditional and non-withdrawable benefits. The silent majority will have become conscious of their approval and might have become vocal about it; and the minority willing and able to express the advantages of unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefits will have converted the rest of society.

Institutional feasibility

This section of the paper will be much shorter, because this feasibility is easier to demonstrate than financial feasibility, and far easier to demonstrate than the possibility of psychological feasibility.

The UK has been paying Family Allowance to every family with more than one child since 1946; and it has been paying Child Benefit for every child since the 1970s. Administration is simple and efficient; almost no fraud occurs, and error rates are negligible.¹² To pay a Citizen's Income to every adult would be even easier, because every child who leaves school is allocated a unique National Insurance Number. Just as importantly, it would be easy to administer an unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefit for any particular age cohort; and whether for the entire population, or for a particular age cohort, the unconditional and nonwithdrawable nature of the benefit would make computerization simple in the extreme.

A Basic Income would be institutionally feasible; and equally institutionally feasible would be an unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefit for any particular age cohort.

Behavioural feasibility

We might think that in order to demonstrate behavioural feasibility we would need to show that a Basic Income would work for households in the sense of providing them with an ideal income maintenance system, somehow defined. Such a demonstration would not be possible. Take the case of housing costs. In London in particular, but also across much of the South-east and elsewhere, housing is becoming unaffordable for large sections of the population, forcing households into living at some distance from their workplaces, or in accommodation too small for their needs, or with too insecure a tenure. An unconditional benefit high enough to enable every household to pay for the accommodation that it needs as well as other living expenses would be unaffordable without politically unsustainable increases in Income Tax rates. For the time being, Housing Benefit, calculated in relation to both housing costs and ability to pay, will be required; and because it is households that live in houses and flats, Housing Benefit will need to continue to be paid on the basis of the household as the claimant unit, unlike the Basic Income, which will be paid equally to every individual of the same age.¹³

Similarly with Council Tax Benefit. The assistance that the Government gives to those with too low an income to pay Council Tax (a local tax that pays for local services) has now been localized, and although Council Tax is always based on the value of the household's accommodation, Council Tax Benefit is differently calculated by every Local Authority. There is no reason in principle why a Basic Income could not be paid at a sufficiently high level to enable Council Tax Benefit to be abolished; but the fact that Council Tax is paid by households and not by individuals, and the fact that Council Tax can be of very different amounts for different households, means that for the time being we must view

¹² Torry, Malcolm (2013) *Money for Everyone: Why we need a Citizen's Income*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp 22-5

¹³ Torry, Malcolm (2013) pp 268-70

it in the same way as Housing Benefit: as an unfortunate part of the current system which for the time being a Basic Income will be able to do nothing about.

However, the replacement of other means-tested benefits with a Basic Income would make a considerable difference to many households, because it would provide them with new options in relation to employment patterns. Take the example of a household in which the male adult has been unemployed for more than a year and the female adult is in low-paying employment. Currently, most of the value of the woman's earnings is deducted from the household's means-tested Jobseeker's Allowance; if the man finds a job then much of the value of the woman's earnings will be deducted from the household's Working Tax Credits; and if Universal Credit is implemented then the same will occur. If Jobseeker's Allowance and Tax Credits were to be replaced by a Basic Income then, whether he was in employment or not, she could earn as much as she wished and the household's Basic Incomes would not change. The household would be in a radically different position. If their Basic Incomes were not enough to live on, and Housing Benefit was still in payment, then both partners would have a substantial incentive to earn sufficient income to enable the household to escape from means-testing altogether: and creating additional net income would be much more possible with a Basic Income because the Basic Income would provide a solid income floor that would never be withdrawn.

All we need to show is that all households would either experience no change if a Basic Income were to be implemented, or would find themselves in a better position: not necessarily in terms of net income on the day of implementation (because for some households net income might go down slightly), but in terms of employment options and the net income possibilities attached to those options. If attempted new behaviours produced advantageous outcomes – whether that be in terms of work-life balance, or increasing net income, or both – then the Basic Income will have been behaviourally feasible.

A potential problem with behavioural feasibility is that, while we might be able to predict behavioural feasibility, it will not be possible to demonstrate it in advance. This is not necessarily a problem, particularly if implementation of a Basic Income is phased in, either by providing every citizen with a very small Basic Income and then increasing it, or by establishing a Basic Income for one demographic group at a time. If an unconditional and nonwithdrawable Pre-Retirement Income were to be paid to adults between the age of 55 and retirement age, paid for by reducing personal tax allowances and means-tested and other benefits, then that group would experience behavioural changes, and policy-makers would be able to evaluate both the changes and their acceptability. This would provide valuable evidence about the behavioural feasibility that might follow the implementation of Basic Incomes for other demographic groups.

Behavioural feasibility matters, but not initially. Implementation of a Basic Income can begin without the behavioural feasibility of a Basic Income for every citizen having been demonstrated.

This means that behavioural feasibility functions rather like psychological feasibility. They are both requirements for successful implementation of a Basic Income, but neither are required prior to the commencement of Basic Income implementation.

Political feasibility

There are two related meanings of 'political feasibility' that we might express by the following two questions: 1. Does a Basic Income cohere with the ideological positions of the UK's major political parties? (- parties in the plural because a Basic Income's implementation would require all-party support); and 2. Given the way in which social policy achieves implementation in the UK, is it possible that a Basic Income might be implemented?

Political ideologies

In my *Money for Everyone: Why we need a Citizen's Income*, I show that for the main recent and current political ideologies in the UK – the New Right, Socialism, One Nation Conservatism, Liberalism, Social Democracy, and New Labour's 'Third Way', and also for a Green perspective – the ideology itself generates arguments for a Basic Income, that arguments for a Basic Income have in fact been developed by proponents of the different ideologies, and that any arguments against a Basic Income developed by proponents of the ideologies are generic: that is, whatever the ideology espoused by the objector, the objections are of the form 'A Basic Income would be too expensive', 'We should not pay people to do nothing', 'Rich people do not need it', or 'A Basic Income would discourage people from seeking employment'.¹⁴ One of the appendices to *Money for Everyone*¹⁵ also examines the ideologies attached to Old Labour (and the Co-operative Movement) and to the Post-War Consensus, and finds the same to be true: the ideologies themselves, and their proponents, offer arguments for a Basic Income, whereas arguments against a Basic Income are the generic ones listed above.

This all suggests that a Basic Income would be politically feasible in the sense that every mainstream UK political ideology, and every proponent of these ideologies, can find reasons to support the implementation of a Basic Income, and any arguments against implementation are not related to those ideologies, and can be answered.

The policy process

It might be important to be able to show that no mainstream UK political ideology would necessarily be a barrier to the implementation of a Basic Income, but if the ways in which policy is made in the UK would preclude the implementation of a Basic Income then ideological acceptability would be irrelevant. I shall therefore give most of the rest of this paper to the question: Given the way in which social policy achieves implementation in the UK, is it possible for a Basic Income to be implemented?

Here I shall take as my guide Michael Hill's *The Public Policy Process*:¹⁶

The policy process is a complex and multi-layered one. It is ... a complex political process in which there are many actors: politicians, pressure groups, civil servants, publicly employed professionals, and even sometimes those who see themselves as the passive recipients of policy.¹⁷

A first step in understanding the policy process in relation to a particular proposal is to ask about the geographical location of relevant factors.¹⁸ For instance: are global factors significant, or do we only need to take account of factors relating to the social and economic environment of the UK (which are, of course, influenced by global factors)? To take a different policy proposal: A 'Tobin' tax on currency transactions¹⁹ might be feasible at a very low level in an individual country, but the fact that banking is a global industry, and that currency exchange can occur in numerous financial centres around the world, means that a Tobin tax at a level that might discourage banks from undertaking currency exchanges in the UK is not feasible. In the case of a Basic Income, it might be thought that a relevant geographical factor would be the free movement of labour in Europe. Would a Basic Income in the UK encourage higher levels of inward migration? The answer to this question is probably 'no' unless the Basic Income were to be set at a level higher than current means-tested and universal benefits. The UK

¹⁴ Torry, Malcolm (2013) *Money for Everyone: Why we need a Citizen's Income*, Bristol: Policy Press, p 228

¹⁵ www.citizensincome.org/MoneyforEveryone.htm. See the appendix for chapter 13.

¹⁶ Hill, Michael (2009) *The Public Policy Process*, 5th edition, Harlow: Pearson/Longman

¹⁷ Hill, Michael (2009) p 4

¹⁸ Hill, Michael (2009) p 47

¹⁹ Adam, Stuart, et al (2011) *Tax by design: The Mirrlees Review*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp 151-3, 195-215

already has an unconditional and nonwithdrawable Child Benefit, payable to anyone with the care of children if they ordinarily reside in the UK, they have a right to be there, and they are physically present in the country.²⁰ Child Benefit is rarely accused of fuelling inward migration. More generally, a Basic Income at a level not above that of existing benefits would provide no additional incentive to migrate to the UK. This means that while it might have looked as if the social and economic environments in other countries might be relevant factors, they might not be, and we can concentrate on institutions and processes within the UK.

Crucial to the policy process are the institutions for which ideas and evidence are inputs, and legislation and implementation are outputs. In the case of the UK, in the field of social security benefits, this means ministers, government departments, and Parliament. Any one part of this tripartite system can block or delay policy change, and all three parts have to co-operate to enable change to occur.²¹ Also essential to the policy process will be a policy community or policy network concerned about a particular issue, or perhaps about a variety of issues. Such networks (around which information pass) and communities (groups of organizations more intimately engaged in the policy process)²² will often be complex, with some members more concerned about one aspect of an issue, and some more concerned about another; and they will overlap with other networks and communities.²³ In relation to a Basic Income, networks concerned with poverty alleviation, poverty abolition, employment incentives, individual freedom, and the voluntary sector, will all be relevant, as will be the already quite well developed network gathered around the idea of a Basic Income.

But however effective interest groups might appear to be, however well organized policy networks and policy communities might appear, and however adequate the general public's understanding and approval of a policy proposal might be, only if the policy community, including the government, the civil service, and parliamentary institutions, can line up to create the necessary change will the policy change occur.²⁴ If they do all line up behind the proposal then members of the policy community will exchange research and other resources with each other in order to achieve policy implementation. If they do not all line up then the community will revert to being a powerless network.²⁵

As Hill suggests, institutions relate to institutions, which means that as well as individual proponents of a policy change relating to individuals within the tripartite system, it is important that institutions within the policy networks and communities attached to a policy proposal should relate to other institutions.²⁶ Think tanks are important because they are institutions that can relate to institutions. Important to both individual and institutional relationships with the Government, the civil service and Parliament will be a recognition that every actor in the system is to some extent self-interested. Each member of parliament, each minister, and each civil servant, will to some extent be influenced by their own interests; and if supporting a proposal would be clearly against their own interests then they would be unlikely to support it. So, for instance, civil servants would be unlikely to support proposals that might reduce the size of their departments.²⁷ They might also be somewhat unenthusiastic about a policy change that appears to be impossible to implement. Successful implementation of a policy can enhance a civil service career. Impending implementation failure will lead to capable civil servants seeking transfer from the department or section involved, for obvious reasons.

²⁰ www.hmrc.gov.uk/childbenefit/start/who-qualifies/new-arrivals-uk.htm

²¹ Hill, Michael (2009) *The Public Policy Process*, 5th edition, Harlow: Pearson/Longman, pp 68, 73

²² Smith, M.J. (1993) 'Policy networks', *Pressure, Power and Policy*, Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp 56-65, pp 76-86 in Hill, Michael (ed.) (197) *The Policy Process: A reader*, 2nd edition, Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, pp 76-7

²³ Hill, Michael (2009) pp 58-66

²⁴ Hill, Michael (2009) p 87

²⁵ Smith, M.J. (1993), pp 82-3

²⁶ Hill, Michael (2009) p 88

²⁷ Hill, Michael (2009) pp 90, 102. Rational choice theory is generally understood as integrated with a particular ideological position, but that does mean that it cannot be a useful tool for understanding the behaviour of public servants

What we have said so far about the policy process makes it look as if it might be orderly and rational, but that is generally far from the truth. Hill describes the policy environment as like a soup within which problems (which are socially constructed²⁸), policy options (again socially constructed), and political factors (constantly influenced by societal pressures), swirl in unpredictable ways. Policy change is generally incremental because that is the only kind that looks feasible within such a complex environment;²⁹ because incremental change enables learning and useful adaptation to occur;³⁰ and because political pressures in a variety of directions will often only allow minor policy changes, and will frequently result in a pendulum effect: for instance, between means-testing and universality.³¹ Another reason for change generally being incremental is that because we have a permanent civil service in the UK, civil servants have to serve consecutive ministers with often very different ideological positions, and seeking consensus is the most likely way to avoid turbulence as governments change.³² (Civil servants achieve the control that they do because ministers have little time available and must therefore rely on civil servants to give regulatory and legislative effect to their ideas.) Yet more reasons for incremental change are that evidence can only be collected from existing systems; that it is often easier to implement changes to existing systems than to build entirely new systems;³³ and that small incremental changes are generally easier for the different parties within a policy network to understand than major system changes would be. The media,³⁴ which is an important and influential component of any policy network, will often not be capable of expressing simply and accurately the smallest policy changes, or public opinion related to them,³⁵ and is therefore highly unlikely to be capable of expressing accurately the reasons for major systems changes: so again, consensus and incremental change will be the safest option.

The policy process is often described as a series of steps, for instance:

1. Precise definition of policy objectives
2. Instruments chosen
3. Implementation arrangements formulated
4. Rules for implementation.³⁶

- whereas in practice 'policy formulation is a piecemeal activity'³⁷ within which the different theoretical steps merge into each other.³⁸ Take the example of changes to the benefits system. Theoretically the minister will take to Parliament a Bill prepared by civil servants according to instructions given by the minister; Parliament will turn the Bill into an Act; and the new policy will then be implemented by civil servants. Things are rarely as simple as that. For instance: if new computer software is required to implement the benefits changes then the computer company writing the software will be an interested party, will attempt to influence both the policy and its regulations, and will often succeed in doing so because their statement that computerization would be cheaper or easier if changes were made, or that computerization would be impossible if changes were not made,

²⁸ Anglund, Sandra M. (1999) 'American Core Values and Policy Problem Definition', pp 147-63 in Nagel, Stuart S. (ed.) *The Policy Process*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, p 151

²⁹ Hill, Michael (2009) *The Public Policy Process*, 5th edition, Harlow: Pearson/Longman, pp 157, 164

³⁰ Richarson, Jeremy (1999) 'Interest Group, Multi-Arena Politics and Policy Change', pp 65-99 in Nagel, Stuart S. (ed.) *The Policy Process*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, p 67

³¹ Barkai, Haim (1998) *The Evolution of Israel's Social Security System*, Aldershot: Ashgate

³² Hill, Michael (2009) p 186. The permanent civil service's consensual methods have now been somewhat diluted by the presence of increasing numbers of externally recruited civil servants and of ministers' political advisers.

³³ Hill, Michael (2009) p 188

³⁴ Hill, Michael (2009) p 167

³⁵ Jacobs, Lawrence R. Nagel and Shapiro, Robert Y. (1999) 'The media Reporting and Distorting of Public Opinion Towards Entitlements', pp 135-45 in Nagel, Stuart S. (ed.) *The Policy Process*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, p 136

³⁶ Hill, Michael (2009) p 174

³⁷ Hill, Michael (2009) p 173

³⁸ Hill, Michael (2009) p 191

would be difficult to contradict. The computer company possesses ‘expert power’ in the situation,³⁹ even if it is not very expert.

When it comes to implementation of a new policy, the situation is equally complex, and precisely how the policy is implemented will depend on the characteristics of the policy and any accompanying regulations, and on the organizations involved in implementation: the relationships between them; their feedback to ministers, Parliament, and the civil service; and the ways in which their staff (functioning as ‘street-level bureaucrats’⁴⁰) implement the policy and exercise discretion in relation to regulations. A further factor will be public response to implementation.⁴¹

We can draw some initial conclusions in relation to the feasibility of a Basic Income:

- Institutional representation of the policy idea is essential: that is, broadly based think tanks and academic departments actively involved in research, dissemination and education, and perhaps a better resourced Citizen’s Income Trust;
- A policy network or community is required in which institutions and individuals representing the media, community groups, academia, political parties, trades unions, employers’ organizations, and generally as wide a range of interests as possible, will relate well to each other, will relate consistently to the issues of poverty, the poverty trap, and a Basic Income, and will together relate to Parliament, the Government, and the civil service;
- An important task will be to prepare draft legislation, regulations, and implementation strategies, because these will make it clear that some of the complexities related to other policy options would not apply to a Basic Income – and, in particular, that computerization would be simple, that institutional arrangements for implementation would be radically simple, and that there would be no street-level bureaucrats to worry about;
- Implementation of a Basic Income would need to be incremental: that is, implementation one demographic group at a time rather than as a single project for the entire age-range.⁴²
- Careful study of current government priorities will be required throughout. Current themes are the disaggregation of the public sector (which suggests that the Basic Incomes should be managed by a separate agency); explicit standards; output controls; and discipline and parsimony in relation to resources (all easy to achieve with a Basic Income).⁴³

Our discussion and its conclusions suggest a range of criteria by which we might judge whether or not a Basic Income is likely to be politically feasible in the sense of a positive response to the question: Given the way in which social policy achieves implementation in the UK, is it possible that a Basic Income might be implemented?

- It will need to address two problems both recognized as serious problems needing solutions: poverty, and the poverty trap;
- It will need to garner government, parliamentary, and civil service support, and this will require public understanding and support;⁴⁴
- An active policy community will need to include trades unions and other social institutions;

³⁹ Hill, Michael (2009) p 191; French, J. R. P., Jr., and B. H. Raven (1959) ‘The Bases of Social Power’, pp 150-67 in Cartwright, D. (ed.) (1959) *Studies in Social Power*, Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, reprinted as pp 150–67 in Pugh, D. S. (1984) *Organization Theory: Selected Readings*, 2nd edition, Harmondsworth: Penguin

⁴⁰ Hill, Michael (2009) *The Public Policy Process*, 5th edition, Harlow: Pearson/Longman, p 299

⁴¹ Hill, Michael (2009) p 212

⁴² Torry, Malcolm (2013) *Money for Everyone: Why we need a Citizen’s Income*, Bristol: Policy Press, pp 49-52

⁴³ Hill, Michael (2009) p 291

⁴⁴ A point made by John McDonnell MP at a meeting at the House of Commons on the 4th March 2014

- Policy change will need to be, and be seen to be, an incremental change or a series of incremental changes (and the existence of pilot projects of some kind will be useful to represent the incremental and proven nature of the change envisaged);
- Implementation will need to be, and be seen to be, feasible, both in relation to transition and in relation to ongoing administration;
- The media will need to be actively involved in the policy network, and both this and public understanding will depend on clearly deserving social groups benefiting from the proposed change or changes – which is again an argument for incremental implementation.

A final word must be said here about a frequent characteristic of the policy process: compromise.⁴⁵ Any compromise over the characteristics of unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefits – for instance, by applying conditions of any kind to their receipt – would destroy the policy proposal, would not deliver the benefits that an unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefit would offer, and would make it more difficult to establish an unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefit for the next demographic group. Here commitment to unconditionality and nonwithdrawability by individual and institutional members of relevant policy networks and communities, and their carefully and consistently expressed arguments for these characteristics, will be essential.

Relationships between feasibilities

Ivan Steiner has identified three types of group task:

- Additive: all group members do the same thing. The outcome is the sum of contributions (as in a tug of war).
- Conjunctive: the performance depends on the performance of the least talented. All members' contributions are needed for success, and the links between the elements are often crucial (as in a relay race).
- Disjunctive: here accomplishment depends on the performance of the most talented member. The group remains better than that individual because even the best at something does not necessarily know all of the right answers (as in a pub quiz). Here the major requirement is that less talented members of the group should not be able to hold back the most talented member.⁴⁶

We might employ this categorization of group tasks analogically to discuss the relationships between the different kinds of feasibility that we have discussed.

If we term the pre-implementation feasibilities required for the establishment of an unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefit for a demographic group financial, institutional, psychological, ideological, and policy process feasibilities, then the argument of this paper suggests that if one of the feasibilities is absent or weak then it is difficult to see how implementation is likely to be possible. This means that the relationships are not disjunctive. Some of the feasibilities relate to each other (for instance, psychological and policy process feasibilities form a circular, or possibly a spiral, process), so here an element of additivity might be present: but generally the feasibilities are independent of each other,⁴⁷ and because they are all required it would appear that we are looking at conjunctive feasibilities. The fact that the order in which the feasibilities are established is important - for instance, financial and institutional feasibilities and a certain amount of psychological feasibility will need to be in place

⁴⁵ Richardson, J.J. (1969) *The Policy-Making Process*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p 107

⁴⁶ Steiner, Ivan D. (1972) *Group Process and Productivity*, New York: Academic Press

⁴⁷ Cf Pasquali, Francesca (2012) *Virtuous Imbalance: Political Philosophy between Desirability and Feasibility*, Farnham: Ashgate, p 60, on the importance of keep ideological considerations separate from other feasibilities. Not to maintain the separation limits 'normative work to the domain of the practically relevant options' (p.188) and therefore constrains it unnecessarily.

before ideological and policy process feasibilities can be built; and that behavioural feasibility then needs to generate the next tranche of psychological feasibility so that the next demographic group can be tackled - makes the relay race analogy even more relevant.

The conjunctive nature of the feasibilities that we have been studying has practical importance because it means that for implementation of a Basic Income to be feasible, even for an individual demographic group, sufficient work needs to be done on all of the feasibilities, and that none can be neglected.

Conclusion

At the BIEN Congress held in München two years ago I discussed De Wispelaere's and Nogeura's categorization of feasibilities: strategic feasibility (that is, the feasibility of persuading policy making institutions to enact a new policy); institutional feasibility; psychological feasibility; and behavioural feasibility.⁴⁸ De Wispelaere and Nogeura had hypothesized that before implementation of a Basic Income both strategic and psychological feasibilities will have to have been established, and that after implementation both behavioural and institutional feasibility will have had to be evidenced in order for the policy change to be sustainable.⁴⁹ I suggested then that the only pre-implementation requirement was strategic feasibility – that is, that policy-making institutions would need to be persuaded. The argument of this paper suggests that that suggestion is of only limited applicability.

Our discussions of psychological feasibility, of behavioural feasibility, and of the policy process, suggest that the establishment of a Basic Income is not feasible. What might be feasible would be an unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefit payable to a demographic group perceived as somehow deserving. Such a benefit would need to be shown to be both institutionally feasible and financially feasible. These tasks would not be difficult to achieve. A public understanding of the deservingness of the social group would then provide sufficient psychological feasibility to enable the policy process to embrace the possibility of implementation, and would enable ideological positions to develop and the necessary political commitments to be expressed. Behavioural feasibility would follow implementation, as would the psychological feasibility necessary for an unconditional and nonwithdrawable benefit to be implemented for the next demographic group. Basic Income established for successive demographic groups (a Citizen's Pension, a Pre-Retirement Income, an Education and Training Income, and an enhanced Child Benefit) would narrow sufficiently the age range without a Basic Income to enable it to become psychologically feasible for a Basic Income to be considered for working age adults and for the policy process to embrace the idea as a necessary completion of a task already nearly completed.

It would appear that the only way forwards for the UK would be the implementation of a Basic Income for one demographic group at a time. What this paper has shown is that the implementation of a Basic Income by that route would be entirely feasible, provided that at every stage we have put the necessary work into all of the different feasibilities required.

⁴⁸ De Wispelaere, Jürgen, and Noguera, José Antonio (2012), 'On the Political Feasibility of Universal Basic Income: An Analytic Framework', pp.17-38 in Caputo, Richard (ed.) (2012), *Basic Income Guarantee: International Experiences and Perspectives on the Viability of Income Guarantee*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan

⁴⁹ De Wispelaere, Jürgen, and Noguera, José Antonio (2012), p.21