

Universal Basic Income – a participative ‘learn in’.

Steady State Manchester and the Social Change and Community Wellbeing research group at MMU held a ‘learn in’ about UBI on September 8th 2016. People came from all sorts of organisations (or from none) and with different background knowledge of UBI. Nearly everyone had read one of the following beforehand, which enabled deep discussion of UBI and how it might work in practice in the UK, contributing to a more equal just and viable society:

1. Richard Murphy and Howard Reed (long article)
[:http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/financing-the-social-state](http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/financing-the-social-state)
2. Green Party:
<https://policy.greenparty.org.uk/assets/files/Policy%20files/Basic%20Income%20Consultation%20Paper.pdf>
3. RSA <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/basic-income/>.
4. Compass <http://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/UniversalBasicIncomeByCompass-Spreads.pdf>
5. Malcolm Torry from Citizens Income Trust:
<https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/working-papers/euromod/em5-16.pdf>

See also the SSM blog on UBI - <https://steadystatemanchester.net/2016/05/09/universal-basic-income-or-citizens-income-a-digest-of-issues>

The approach we took was that everyone in the room was an expert, so the format we followed was of deep discussion in small groups about the different proposals and other information about UBI that participants brought to the discussions. The groups summarised the important issues arising from the discussions, and identified the next steps and further learning they would like to see.

Inspiration to arise from the discussions:

- Surprise that the Royal Society of Arts should put themselves behind something so political in their report: *Creative citizen, creative state: the principled and pragmatic case for a Universal Basic Income* <https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/basic-income>
- The potential of UBI to reduce stigmatisation
- The potential change in thinking about work more broadly, alongside thinking about care and how people care across the lifespan.
- The issue of technological change and the [possibility that people will have to work less.
- Work conditionality stigmatises people and UBI would remove this (potentially).
- The possibility that there is a better balance between paid and unpaid work.
- The enthusiasm for an overhaul of the whole social system
- Amazement at the momentum gathering behind the idea of UBI and at how big it might get.

- The realisation that UBI is a tangible way forward.
- Excitement at the possibility of UBI being implemented with some adjustments.

Let's learn more about...

- Learn more about the different schemes – we can do this by reading up ourselves!
- More about the pilots that have taken place (eg in Holland, Finland's proposals) and how it has worked out in practice.
- More about the potential impact and consequences for particular groups such as asylum seekers, women.
- More about what other policies would have to accompany UBI.
- More about what the general public think.
- How to implement a pilot in UK.
- Learn more about other countries, e.g. why Switzerland voted against introducing UBI.
- The cultural impact of introducing UBI and what the knock on effects of change might be.

Next steps?

- Find out what the Labour Party is doing and proposing.
- Hold other workshops related to UBI.
- Identify how we might build consensus for a political shift in favour of UBI.
- Examine how we could pilot UBI in this country.
- Campaign for a whole world UBI, starting with the poorest. See <http://worldbasicincome.org.uk>.
- Learn more and talk more to others about what we have learnt today.
- Hold a panel discussion including people with different perspectives.

A thought experiment- how would UBI change lives?:

We asked participants to tell us more on feedback sheets. In particular, we asked people to say how they think their lives would change if UBI was introduced and the answers to this gives an insight into how UBI might contribute to a more viable and fulfilling way of living. Imagine if these benefits to wellbeing, security, reduced emphasis on paid work, involvement in community projects, valuing caring and voluntary work, increased equality and positive cultural change were extended to the whole population! The only participants who were not sure that their lives would change with a UBI were those in receipt of a pension – in itself a form of UBI!

Wellbeing

- I'd give it to my kids: they would be happier and therefore I would be too.
- Less stress, but would largely carry out the same work.

Security

- Personally not sure, but maybe more security.
- I'd take more risks with my career.
- As a free-lancer, it could reduce anxiety and worries about income and give me space to try new things.
- I am reasonably secure, so my life would not change much with UBI.

- I might worry less about money.
- I only have precarious work at the moment so a bit more financial stability would improve my life.
- I would work part time and spend time on social projects in the community so my work-life as whole would look like that.

Better balance between paid and unpaid work for the social good

- I would set up my own business as an eco-builder and renovator and be able to do more work for *World Basic Income*, without having to spend my time on silly (casual and low paid) jobs to earn money
- I am now retired, but it would have allowed me to give up paid work earlier and do 'useful things.
- I have a teachers' pension so I am not sure I would have more money. Maybe it would have enabled me to do more?
- Fewer hours at (paid) work and more projects of my own.

Increased equality

- I would have more money than I have ever had.
- It would change a lot. At the moment I earn £72 a week plus housing benefit and council tax support.
- I might experience higher levels of personal taxation!
- For people I know on benefits or in low paid jobs, it would bring relief.
- It would produce a more stable and equal society.

Valuing caring and community work

- UBI would add value to caring and to voluntary work

Culture change

- UBI would be generally better for the wider society

Not sure it would..

- Not much – I live on a small pension and this would not alter much
- Not of direct relevance to me at this point in time

What is attracts people to UBI?

As we think about how we can develop a wider understanding of and acceptance of the idea of UBI, it is important to get a sense of what it is that appeals to people about the idea. So we asked participants just that. Before they came to the 'learn-in' the things that interested them most about UI were varied, but generally clustered around changing society's norms and values, particularly placing greater emphasis on activities that were not paid work and justice. If UBI could contribute to these two social goals, that would surely be a good thing?

Changing society's norms and values

- Changing the culture of society.
- Freedom, dignity and the chance to change work to something truly valuable.
- The broader social shift that would occur if we implement UBI in the right way! If the existing benefit system was changed to remove stigma and support people who

don't have access to full employment, then social life more generally would be much improved.

- Work shouldn't be the be-all and end-all and there are many things that people do that are worthwhile.
- Values unpaid work
- Re-balances paid and unpaid work (such as care, volunteering, neighbourhood activities)
- Reduce/remove stigmatisation of people on benefits
- Time and how work is valued differently.
- Removing the punitive nature of the 'welfare' system, releasing people's capacities for creativity and valuing unpaid caring and voluntary work.
- The ability of people to improve their lives.

Increasing equality and social justice

- Making the country more equal, reducing the wealth gap.
- More equality
- Gives people on benefits more power
- The idea that UBI might achieve some measure of social justice
- Better way of delivering welfare
- Efficient and cost effective system of welfare.
- It is income guaranteed and free for sanctions.
- Providing real social security.
- Replacement of a hugely iniquitous welfare system.
- I have a long standing commitment to addressing UK poverty issues and am concerned about the failure of the current welfare reform system. BI is a new approach that could avoid many of the negatives of the current system (Benefits traps, stigma) whilst contributing to economic development and potentially help to revive struggling local economies.
- Globally, the chance to end humiliating poverty suffered by so many and redistribute global wealth.
- Poverty alleviation.

Enhancing community building

- It would be good if we all worked fewer hours and had time to engage with the world.

The possibility it could work

- It has realistic aims
- Its popularity
- Its universality (like the NHS)
- I am interested in how it would work

For another summary of the 'learn in' see

<https://nicobobinus.wordpress.com/2016/09/09/the-universal-basic-income-learn-in/>

Also see: <http://worldbasicincome.org.uk> emailing info@worldbasicincome.org.uk for more information

What next?

There was great enthusiasm for further events exploring implementation issues; learning from elsewhere; ways to address the political context and the stigmatising of people claiming benefits; alternative progressive ideas for reforming and de-stigmatising welfare; debates with alternative perspectives and detractors presenting; opportunities to gain wider public views; learning from pilots. Thank you to all those who offered to help organise or participate in future events – we will be in touch as we hope to be able to put on some more events. Look out for information at <https://steadystatemanchester.net/calendar>