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Guiding principles for social security policy: outcomes from a bottom-up approach

Journal:	<i>Social Policy & Administration</i>
Manuscript ID	SPA-2021-0084.R2
Wiley - Manuscript type:	Original Article
Keywords:	Social protection and security, Welfare policy, Data and research, qualitative
Region:	United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland
Additional Keywords:	Participatory, Experts by Experience, Methodology
Abstract:	<p>Covid-19 has highlighted the inadequacy of UK social security but also the lack of consensus amongst progressive actors about what would be a better system. One way forward is to focus on the principles that should underpin social security. We present outcomes from a project in which principles were considered by a panel of Expert by Experience benefit claimants. We argue that while scholars often engage in descriptively identifying social security principles in existing policy, the bottom-up approach presented here offers a way of generating normative principles to guide an improved future system. We identify key contributions of this bottom-up approach relating to: the critical importance of principles as a guide to the fundamental purpose of social security, and policy making; the relationship between the treatment of claimants and benefit levels as co-dependent; and how a bottom-up process can produce results that engage with and contribute holistically to the debate.</p>

Guiding principles for social security policy: outcomes from a bottom-up approach

Abstract

Covid-19 has highlighted the inadequacy of UK social security but also the lack of consensus amongst progressive actors about what would be a better system. One way forward is to focus on the principles that should underpin social security. We present outcomes from a project in which principles were considered by a panel of Expert by Experience benefit claimants. We argue that while scholars often engage in descriptively identifying social security principles in existing policy, the bottom-up approach presented here offers a way of generating normative principles to guide an improved future system. We identify key contributions of this bottom-up approach relating to: the critical importance of principles as a guide to the fundamental purpose of social security, and policy making; the relationship between the treatment of claimants and benefit levels as co-dependent; and how a bottom-up process can produce results that engage with and contribute holistically to the debate.

1. Introduction

Covid-19 has highlighted the inadequacy of social security in the United Kingdom – in academic analyses of emergency income support measures (see Machin, 2021; Simpson, 2020); attention being drawn to low rates of benefits (e.g. TUC, 2020a); and public debate such as that generated by footballer Marcus Rashford's campaign around free school meals and child poverty.¹ What has also been highlighted is the lack of consensus amongst progressive actors as to what would be a better system. We use the term 'Progressive' to indicate not a particular political orientation but holding the broad ideals that social security policy should achieve (some degree of) poverty alleviation and reduce economic inequalities between groups. Such a view stands in contrast to the recent direction of travel for social security policy, which can be characterised as following a 'welfare reform'² agenda, pursuing a punitive approach to working-age benefits, marked by sanctions, conditionality and low(ered) payment levels (see Dwyer, 2004; Dwyer and Wright, 2014; Finch and Gardiner, 2018; Millar and Bennett, 2016). Recent 'welfare reform' is typified by the Welfare Reform Act 2012, which introduced Universal Credit as the UK's primary income replacement benefit.

Key progressive voices have been strongly critical of 'welfare reform'. To cite one example, Lister (2016) contends that the current UK system is not preventing poverty, relieves it inadequately and the growing reliance on food banks is the most visible of a multitude of unmet needs. Despite such criticism it was evident, even before the pandemic, that there was little consensus on an alternative direction for policy. As Batty and Orton (2018) note, on proximal policy issues such as housing, early childhood education and care, and minimum wage levels, there is considerable consensus (within civil society) as to what needs to be done and some detailed plans for how to implement change. However, on the issue of social security, consensus is lacking:

“There are strong advocates of an unconditional universal Basic or Citizen's Income while others express preference for contribution-based entitlements

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3 or universal but means-tested benefits. There are different views on the
4 importance that should be given to public services versus individual income
5 support measures or whether to prioritise immediate issues such as the
6 bedroom tax or longer-term changes to Universal Credit and the tax system
7 more generally.” (ibid.)
8
9

10 We consider why there might be such a lack of consensus and suggest in this article
11 that efforts in two main directions might offer a way forward: first is to focus on how to
12 approach formulating the *principles* that underpin social security policy; second is to
13 pursue *bottom-up* approaches to policymaking. By principles we mean implicit or
14 explicit value statements that underpin and guide the content and direction of policy.
15 This is in contrast to, for example, a ‘goal’ which expresses a desired outcome or end
16 point; or an ‘ideal’ which expresses a broader normative position that might not so
17 clearly relate to specific policy formulations.
18
19

20 The lack of current consensus is demonstrated by the plethora of competing
21 progressive policy proposals on social security made since the onset of the pandemic.
22 Examples include a Minimum Income Guarantee (New Economics Foundation, 2020),
23 a Minimum Income Standard (Maqueen, 2020) and a Liveable Income Guarantee
24 (Molloy, 2020). Universal Basic Income continues to attract both support (e.g. Lansley,
25 2020) and criticism (Coote and Percy, 2020) while some groups have focused on
26 revisions to Universal Credit. For example, the Poverty Alliance (2020) suggests that
27 the basic Universal Credit allowance be doubled, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation
28 (2020) proposes increasing it to £150 per week (£260 for couples) and the TUC
29 (2020b) also calls for the latter figure (£260) but per individual not couple. These
30 proposals are all aimed at reducing poverty and economic inequality, but the proposed
31 schemes also have fundamental differences. A Universal Basic Income would not be
32 means tested whereas the Minimum/Guaranteed Income options would. Proposals for
33 a Universal Basic Income suggest a variety of different models and the same applies
34 to Minimum/Guaranteed Income ideas. Reforms to Universal Credit include
35 suggestions for widely disparate benefit rates. It is lack of consensus that is most
36 evident, rather than points of agreement.
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40

41 Putting forward competing progressive proposals appears to some extent
42 unproductive, as further options are generated but disagreement remains. An
43 alternative approach is instead to focus on an issue raised previously in *Social Policy*
44 *& Administration* (Patrick and Simpson, 2020): that of the principles that should
45 underpin social security, and, we argue, *how* these principles might be generated. We
46 suggest that the proposals noted above are marked by their lack of explicit principles.
47 Some implicit principles can be deduced, for example Universal Basic Income rejects
48 means-testing, but what is needed is the explicit formulation of social security
49 principles.
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53 Patrick and Simpson (2020) consider principles in their *Social Policy & Administration*
54 article. They are concerned with dignity within social security and provide a compelling
55 account of its importance. However, they locate dignity in the context of a broader
56 interest in principles, exemplified by the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. Patrick
57 and Simpson consider in some detail how the principles developed by the Scottish
58 Government open a broader debate beyond the principle of dignity. What is important
59 here is how principles create a bridge between ideals and what might be practicably
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3 done, through making explicit what should underpin and guide action and practice.
4 While progressives may share broad ideals around pursuing economic equality and
5 anti-poverty goals, what is missing are explicit principles that provide the required
6 bridge to policy development. Setting out guiding principles is therefore essential for
7 identifying and working towards shared policy goals (for a broader discussion of issues
8 around progressive principles see New Economics Foundation and Compass, 2015;
9 [reference deleted to ensure anonymity]).
10

11
12 It is also important to consider *how* principles are formulated – this is the second
13 central issue in this article. Patrick and Simpson's research draws on what they
14 describe as both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' perspectives. The interest in a bottom-up
15 perspective reflects renewed and growing attention being given to what in broad terms
16 can be called participatory research approaches in social policy (Patrick, 2019) and
17 the role of 'lived experience' data (McIntosh and Wright, 2019). These sorts of data
18 can provide insights and knowledge which might otherwise be absent in social policy
19 debate (see also Summers and Young, 2020). Furthermore, participatory methods
20 provide scope to upset or challenge taken for granted narratives or characterisations
21 (Beresford, 2016; Patrick, 2019). Regarding social security specifically, what this
22 means is foregrounding the personal, lived experiences of benefit claimants. A
23 misapprehension in some current social security policy research is that 'experiential
24 ways of knowing' (McIntosh and Wright, 2019: 462), that is, the type of knowledge
25 accumulated from being a social security claimant, are only relevant to describing and
26 understanding one's own biographical situation. Instead, we argue, in line with strands
27 of the participatory methodology literature (Bennett with Roberts, 2004: 6), experiential
28 knowledge can be applied to explicitly deliberate and consider how social security
29 *policy* can be formed and changed. Further, this approach to lived experience data
30 repositions the role of the holders of such knowledge in the research process: moving
31 from an extractive, backwards-looking focus on past experiences and problems, to a
32 generative, forward-looking focus on policy solutions (Orton, 2019).
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38 Following from the above discussion we seek to answer two questions in this article:
39 what are the principles that should guide a progressive social security system; and
40 how can a bottom-up approach be used to arrive at those principles? We address
41 these two questions by examining findings from an innovative project which has both
42 considered the issue of principles and placed emphasis on the importance of bottom-
43 up participatory processes. The structure of the article is as follows. First (in section
44 2), we consider the status of existing social security principles, identifying 'researcher-
45 generated' (section 2.1) and policymaker-generated' (section 2.2) principles. We
46 suggest that part of the work of researchers tends to be to *identify* and *describe* the
47 principles that are implicit in social security policy. On the other hand, policymakers
48 sometimes engage in explicitly *expressing normative* principles that underpin policy
49 (proposals). For the former we consider key examples of researcher-identified
50 principles, and for the latter we focus on two key contrasting contemporary examples:
51 the UK White Paper *21st Century Welfare* (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010)
52 which introduced Universal Credit, and; the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. In
53 section 3 we highlight processes by which principles are generated, and in particular,
54 the contrast between top down and bottom-up approaches. We then consider the
55 project and its methods (section 4) followed by (in section 5) presentation of the
56 principles generated from the bottom-up approach alongside the principles identified
57 in the first section of the paper. Finally (in section 6), we discuss the key implications
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of the bottom-up approach with a particular emphasis on: the importance of principles as a normative guide to the fundamental purpose of social security, and policy making; the relationship between the treatment of claimants and benefit levels, and; working holistically to generate principles. The article concludes by returning to, and answering, the two research questions.

2. Guiding principles of social security

We noted in our introduction that principles tended to be absent in contemporary progressive policy proposals. We turn now to consider the status of principles in social security policy(making), against which we can then compare the principles generated by the bottom-up approach. We consider two main ways in which principles have been identified or created to date. First, we look briefly at the work that academic researchers tend to do, which is to conduct analyses to *describe* the principles that underpin policy (although this may also then involve considering the normative status of these principles the central enterprise is a descriptive one). Second, we look at the work that policymakers sometimes do, which involves explicitly articulating the normative principles that guide their policy proposals. These exercises both tend to be 'top-down', although we consider the Social Security (Scotland) 2018 Act as a prominent case where policymakers also incorporated participatory approaches to generate their principles.

2.1. Researcher-identified principles

One of the objectives of academic research has been to analyse social security policy in order to identify and describe underpinning principles (e.g. Millar, 2018). Deducing and describing principles from policy developments provides understanding of policy trajectories over time. What follows is a short summary of some of the key researcher-identified principles that can be taken to characterise social security policy in the United Kingdom at important moments of development. Beginning with the Elizabethan Poor Laws of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, a central principle was a distinction between the 'deserving' and the 'undeserving' poor as a way of identifying those in 'genuine' need of relief. Officials were required to distinguish between those "impotent to serve and those able to serve or labour" (Stone, 1984: 35). Parish based Elizabethan Poor Laws were centralised in the new 1834 Poor Law whereby the 'deserving versus undeserving' principle was cemented, particularly in the operation of the workhouse. A second principle found in the Elizabethan Poor Laws, which became further embedded in the 1834 Poor Law, was the principle of 'less eligibility', that is, that anyone in receipt of relief (benefits) must not be better off than the worst paid labourer.

The establishment of the post 1945 welfare state aimed to eradicate Beveridge's infamous so called 'five giants' of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness. This provided the basis for policies of universal health care, free at the point of delivery; universal education; massively expanded public housing and full (male) employment. Marshall (1950: 69) theorised these reforms in his classic account of social citizenship as enabling people "to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society". Principles of smoothing incomes across the life-course and protecting against unforeseen circumstances to achieve a socially acceptable standard of living underpinned the

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2
3 Beveridge model. While Beveridge's system did indeed provide far greater social
4 security, the primarily social insurance-based model assumed a male breadwinner
5 (Lewis, 1992) and left gaps in income support and supplementary payments (Abel-
6 Smith and Townsend, 1966).
7

8
9 Indeed, principles implicit from Elizabethan times can be identified in present day
10 social security policy. While contemporary language may differ – for example, 'strivers
11 versus skivers' - the 'deserving/undeserving' principle remains evident in analyses of
12 twenty first century policy (see, for example, Patrick, 2016; Edmiston and Humpage,
13 2018). The contemporary mantra that 'work must pay', and no one in receipt of modern
14 benefits must be better off than someone in paid employment, plainly echoes the less
15 eligibility principle of the Poor Law (Osborne, 2013). Alongside this, recent analyses
16 have extended conceptualisations of deservingness and entitlement to capture how
17 these function in contemporary social security policy. Specifically, the principle can be
18 summarised as social rights being granted upon the fulfilment of responsibilities
19 (Dwyer, 2004). Entitlement to social security becomes a conditional right to be earned.
20 The suite of welfare reforms introduced through the 2010s further embedded this
21 principle, whereby, "Universal Credit [saw] comprehensive conditionality become a
22 founding principle of state financial support for people of working age in twenty-first
23 century Britain." (Dwyer and Wright, 2014: 33).
24
25

26
27 To establish a framework for comparison with the principles presented later in this
28 article, we can organise these principles identified by researchers into the following
29 categories:
30

- 31
32 ○ Deservingness: Those who are deserving should receive more help/
33 support than those who are undeserving. Deservingness must, at times,
34 be proven, including through the fulfilment of conditional criteria.
- 35 ○ Less eligibility: It should always be less appealing, and less well-paid, to
36 be in receipt of benefits as opposed to being in the labour market.
- 37 ○ Security: The social security system should smooth income over the life
38 course and offer protection against unforeseen life events.
- 39 ○ Dignity: The social security system should achieve a socially acceptable
40 standard of living.
41
42

43 2.2. Policymaker generated principles

44
45 We now turn to consider two prominent examples of social security policy that
46 evidence policymaker-generated principles. Here we draw on: *21st Century Welfare*
47 (Department for Work and Pensions, 2010) and the Social Security (Scotland) Act
48 2018. We select these as crucial cases typifying the direction of contemporary social
49 security policy, that also offer a further point of comparison with the bottom-up'
50 generated principles presented later in this article. *21st Century Welfare* is a White
51 Paper published by the 2010-15 Coalition Government, setting out their 'welfare
52 reform' trajectory and the introduction of Universal Credit. It included seven explicit
53 principles.⁴ The second example, the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018, forms part
54 of Scottish government's policy development under powers devolved from the UK
55 government. The scope for action by the Scottish government remains constrained
56 with only around 15 per cent of benefits spending devolved. But the Scottish
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1
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3 government is pursuing its own approach and the 2018 Act set out its underpinning
4 principles.
5

6
7 We identify the manifest principles in these two documents and present them in Table
8 1, organised under the categories established in section 2.1. What emerges is the
9 stark contrast between the two. The fundamental difference in approach is
10 immediately evident in the two different titles of the documents, one using the term
11 'welfare' and the other 'social security'. The titles set the tone for what follows. Thus,
12 *21st Century Welfare* begins with two principles about work (meaning paid
13 employment). The purpose of benefits here is to encourage, or enforce, movement
14 'away' from benefits and into paid employment. With the Scotland Act, work is not
15 mentioned and its starting points are social security as an investment, human right
16 and public service – terms which do not feature in *21st Century Welfare*. The Scotland
17 Act's principles express concern for the dignity of individuals while *21st Century*
18 *Welfare* sets up a focus on 'fairness' between 'recipients' and 'taxpayers', thus creating
19 a division between 'we the people, the taxpayers, the givers' against 'them the poor,
20 the takers, the undeserving', a discourse that reinforces poverty and claiming benefits
21 as something negative (Sinfield, 2018a). Further principles include the promotion of
22 'positive behaviour' and reinforcing conditionality. Reducing poverty is explicit in the
23 Scotland principles whereas *21st Century Welfare* proposes that 'basic needs' are
24 considered'. Fundamental differences are evident throughout the two documents,
25 which is clear when they are organised under the categories identified previously. We
26 also add two further categories: 'affordability' and 'claimant involvement', to cover all
27 of the principles. It is notable that there are shared principles in terms of the former,
28 but only mention of 'claimant involvement' among the Scottish principles.
29
30
31
32

33 [insert Table 1 about here]
34

35 Table 1 illustrates the divergence between the two sets of principles, leading to very
36 different policy trajectories. On the one hand is a 'welfare' system based on moving
37 people into any work, a discourse that others social security recipients (Lister,
38 2021:90-98) an absence of emphasis on poverty alleviation⁵ and a focus on
39 affordability. These principles animate specific policies such as the benefits cap,
40 freezes to payment levels and increasing conditionality (see Hills, 2015; Watts and
41 Fitzpatrick, 2018). The alternative set of principles envisage a social security system
42 that is an investment, a human right and public service that should reduce poverty and
43 advances equality and non-discrimination.
44
45

46
47 The Scottish principles were developed in part through participatory means, where
48 'experience panels' fed into policy development. A bottom-up approach is partly in
49 evidence. In seeking a progressive way forward for the UK, 'copy Scotland' is a
50 tempting mantra. However, we suggest that the approach remains for the most part
51 'top-down' and policymaker driven. The experience panels were one component within
52 an overarching top-down approach and were not the central mode of policy
53 development. This becomes apparent when we consider the substance of the
54 principles that are produced and what they might be expected to achieve. One such
55 example in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 relates to the prevention of poverty.
56 Sinfield (2018b) highlights the importance of prevention but notes this is not mentioned
57 at all in the Scottish principles. Sinfield (ibid.) also notes the statement in the *Poverty*
58 *& Inequality Commission on Child Poverty Delivery Plan* that the Scottish Government:
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3 “In order to make a sustainable change to child poverty in Scotland must deliver an
4 inclusive growth agenda that genuinely benefits all!” Sinfield argues that to be
5 meaningful the words ‘and works to prevent poverty’ should be added.
6

7
8 A further issue is that the Scottish principles remain unclear as they relate to the core
9 purpose of social security. In more detailed consideration of this, Sinfield (2019) draws
10 on a number of suggested approaches. For example, the International Labour Office
11 (ILO) contends that:
12

13 Social security...is the response to an aspiration for security in its widest
14 sense. Its fundamental purpose is to give individuals and families the
15 confidence that their level of living and quality of life will not, in so far as is
16 possible, be greatly eroded by any social or economic eventuality.
17 (International Labour Office, 1984)
18
19

20 In a similar vein, an objective of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and
21 Cultural Rights (ICESCR) specifically sets out the duty of any government to:
22

23 take steps...to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to
24 achieving progressively the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural
25 rights without discrimination of any kind. (United Nations, 1966, Article 2 (1))
26
27

28 The Scottish principles do not offer such an unambiguous expression of what social
29 security is *for*.
30

31
32 In this section we have identified ‘top-down’ examples whereby researchers seek to
33 identify and describe principles, and policymakers generate and express principles in
34 social security policy. We now turn to consider what can be achieved when principles
35 are generated using a ‘bottom-up’ approach.
36

37 38 **3. The process of developing principles** 39

40 The discussion so far has focused on identifying the content of principles that were
41 generated ‘top-down’ by researchers and policymakers. We suggest that close
42 attention should be paid to how principles are created. As has been identified,
43 principles may be unstated (as with many contemporary progressive social security
44 policy proposals); it may be possible to deduce principles in long term policy shifts or
45 trends (as shown by considering examples of research on the Elizabethan Poor Laws,
46 New Poor Laws, Beveridge and contemporary welfare state systems); or they may be
47 more or less explicitly stated in policy documents (as with the examples of the Welfare
48 Reform White Paper and Social Security Scotland Act).
49

50
51 An important additional layer in our argument is to delineate more clearly between
52 *descriptive* and *normative* principles. Researchers examine policies to deduce and
53 describe underpinning principles. However, this does not provide criteria for assessing
54 whether – in our case from a progressive perspective – these are ‘good’ or ‘bad’
55 principles, and whether these principles *should* be applied to progressive policy
56 development. There is, therefore, a need to think more clearly about how to formulate
57 *normative* principles. That is, there is a need to be clear in social policy making, and
58 social security policy making specifically, about which principles *should* be applied.
59
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3 One way of doing this might be to decide, and apply, a specific philosophical
4 perspective (see, for example, propositions for a eudaimonic ethic of social security –
5 Dean, 2008). Alternatively, what is considered in this article, is the merits of bottom-
6 up approaches for developing normative principles. From this perspective, the
7 normative authority comes from those with lived-experience being placed at the centre
8 of the process, allowing for their insights to take precedence (for a discussion of the
9 importance of recognising 'whose priorities' are being listened to, see Chambers,
10 1983: 141-45).
11
12

13
14 Bottom-up approaches are often not incorporated into the policy process. One of the
15 reasons the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 is notable is because of its use of
16 'experience panels' and other modes of engagement with those with personal
17 experience of claiming social security benefits (The Scottish Government, 2018).
18 Nevertheless, that engagement can be characterised as broadly consisting of
19 consultation and information gathering exercises that sat alongside other modes of
20 policy development. The research project presented in this article considers the merits
21 of a more exclusive and wholesale bottom-up process for developing normative social
22 security principles (i.e. the principles that *should* underpin progressive social security
23 policymaking) with people with lived experience not simply being consulted but
24 themselves determining principles, as will now be discussed.
25
26

27 **4. The research project**

28
29 The findings presented here are from a larger project in which a panel of people with
30 lived experience of benefits sought to develop proposals for how the social security
31 system can be improved, which included explicitly deliberating and deciding on
32 underlying principles. To be clear, the concern of this article is the project's outcomes
33 concerning principles. While process forms a sub-component of our argument here,
34 methodological issues related to the deliberative research process are given primary
35 focus elsewhere [reference excluded to ensure anonymity]. The project was structured
36 explicitly to recognise the knowledge and expertise of those with direct experience of
37 the social security system (Bennett with Roberts, 2004). It is characteristic of other
38 participatory approaches with its focus on facilitating group discussion and emphasis
39 on people with lived experience discussing wider systemic policy issues and solutions,
40 as opposed to only talking about their own personal experiences (Beresford et al.,
41 1999).
42
43
44

45
46 By way of context, the project developed out of collaboration between an academic
47 researcher, a claimant-led group in London and a Deaf and Disabled People's
48 Organisation, based on a shared interest in an idea of identifying proposals for
49 improving the social security system led by people with lived experience of benefits.
50 Funding for a project was obtained and the first step was creating a panel of people
51 with lived experience. This was done using the project partners' networks and a
52 purposive sampling approach to ensure a range of experience of different benefits/
53 elements of the social security system, and diversity in terms of age, ethnicity, gender,
54 and other personal characteristics. The result was a panel of 16 people in total, all
55 either currently or recently in receipt of benefits. Participants determined that
56 they wished to be referred to as 'Experts by Experience', reflecting the position of
57 authority they occupied. Summary characteristics of the participating Experts by
58 Experience are presented in Table 2.
59
60

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Participants were supported by a three-person academic secretariat. The basic structure was that the panel met monthly, with the content and structure of discussion determined and led by the Experts by Experience. The members of the secretariat prepared briefing notes and other resources at the request of the panel to deliberate. Group dynamics were integral to how discussion developed (see for example, Belzile and Oberg, 2012, for further discussion on the importance of accounting for group interaction). We do not consider these methodological issues in detail here but note that the self-consciousness with which discussion proceeded was striking, with group members instating practices (for example, pre-meeting preparatory sessions, shared chairing duties) to ensure all members of the group were given the best opportunity to be heard. Throughout all stages of the project the emphasis was on being led by the Experts by Experience, with participants explicitly positioned as the decision makers. This places the research project towards the 'upper end' of a spectrum of possible approaches to participation (Bergold and Thomas, 2012), whereby the authority of Experts by Experience, founded on their experiential knowledge, is centred at each stage of the research process.

Turning to discussion of the social security principles specifically, some of the Experts by Experience had been involved in a previous civil society initiative in which principles had been discussed but where an outcome was not reached. As participants in the project discussed how to approach the task of identifying proposals for reforming the social security system, some referred to their experience in the earlier initiative. The panel considered various options and decided it would begin by seeking to produce a set of principles itself. Consideration was given to principles over three consecutive monthly (half day) meetings. This meant specific time was dedicated to collaborative discussion of principles but between meetings panel members had time to reflect and consult within their own networks. At the request of the panel of Experts by Experience, the secretariat produced briefing notes to support developing and deciding the principles. Materials included the principles from what at that point was the Scottish Social Security bill, the ILO and some gleaned from civil society organisations such as the Child Poverty Action Group.³ Through ongoing discussion the Experts by Experience unpicked these various examples and generated their own five core principles. They then went through an iterative process, discussing each principle, its intent and meaning, until precise wording was agreed. Before presenting and discussing the outcome of that process, it is critical to emphasise that the principles were decided on by the Experts by Experience and not by the researchers. The analysis in this paper is ours, on which other scholars may have differing views, but the principles themselves are as identified by the Experts by Experience.

5. Five guiding principles for social security

The outcome of the process described above is that the Experts by Experience set out five principles that should underpin social security. The five principles are as follows.

1. Make sure everyone has enough money to live – and support extra costs e.g. to do with disability and children.

2. Treat everyone with dignity, respect and trust, and the belief that people should be able to choose for themselves.
3. Be a public service with rights and entitlements.
4. Be clear, simple, user friendly and accessible to all, involving people who have actual experience of the issues, including from all impairment groups, in creating and running the system as a whole.
5. Include access to free advice and support. Make sure people can access support to speak up, be heard or make a complaint.

We now consider these principles using the categories developed in section 3 of security, dignity, deservingness, less eligibility, claimant involvement and affordability. This structure allows us to compare these Expert by Experience generated principles with the existing 'top-down' principles that we identified earlier. The 'bottom-up' principles are presented alongside the 'top-down' principles in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The first principle identified by Experts by Experience in this project relates to security. In section 3.1 we presented principles stemming from the Beveridgean welfare state that social security should smooth income over the life course and protect against unforeseen events. The formulation reached by the Experts by Experience that we should 'make sure everyone has enough money to live' is powerful in its simple and accessible meaning. When compared to the contemporary policy examples presented in Table 1, it is notable that these come with caveats: Universal Credit commits to ensuring those *most* in need are provided for, and the Scottish principles aim to *contribute* to reducing poverty. The unequivocal nature of the Experts by Experience principle that *everyone* should have enough money to live stands in contrast.

Any set of principles begs questions of how they translate into actionable proposals. In relation to social security, other formulations of principles have appealed to ideas such as achieving 'a decent standard of living', a 'basic level of income' or the 'ability to lead a full life'. Instead, having 'enough money to live', and acknowledgement that this differs depending on factors such as disability and household make-up, expresses a clear focus on ensuring adequacy of outcome. That is, that what matters is the achieved standard of living. There is also resonance with what is articulated by the label a 'Living Wage' (Ryan, 2004:15-19): payment levels should go beyond sustaining existence and be about 'living'. The principle also communicates a clear departure from less eligibility, with the rationale focused on standard of living, as opposed to payment levels being primarily conceived of as a way to encourage or discipline people into the labour market.

The second principle places a strong emphasis on dignity. This provides support for Patrick and Simpson's (2020) emphasis on dignity as a key element of social security. It is notable that dignity is placed alongside respect and trust as the qualities that should guide how people are treated within the social security system. We can in part understand this trio as a response by the Experts by Experience to having experienced indignity, disrespect and mistrust within the current system. Principles relating to dignity are notably absent among the Universal Credit principles, and notable for their presence in the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018. Once Experts by Experience

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3 become involved in the formulation of principles, dignity and related concepts become
4 of central importance.
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7 Under the category of deservingness, the principles set out by the Experts by
8 Experience sit in clear opposition to the current approach of social security benefits as
9 conditional. As noted above, conditionality regimes have increasingly come to
10 characterise Anglo-Saxon welfare states in recent years, with social security not
11 guaranteed but dependent on the recipient fulfilling various obligations in order to
12 receive it (Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2018). The idea, captured in the third principle, that
13 social security is a right, is a dramatically different approach. This aligns with the
14 perspective taken by UN special rapporteur Phillip Alston (UN Human Rights Council
15 – Office of the High Commissioner, 2018), including his argument that a rights-based
16 approach should drive approaches to social security post-pandemic (UN Human
17 Rights Council – Office of the High Commissioner, 2020). Further, we can also see
18 that the category of less eligibility does not apply to the Expert by Experience
19 generated principles, having been present historically and in the Universal Credit
20 principles.
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24 Principles four and five relate to the category of claimant involvement. This again
25 demonstrates the very different approach put forward by the Experts by Experience
26 compared to the Universal Credit principles where claimant involvement does not
27 feature. While appearing closer to the Scottish participatory social security approach,
28 they also go much further. The relevant Social Security (Scotland) Act principles are
29 premised on being designed *with* the people of Scotland. Principles four and five here
30 are not just stating that claimants should be consulted, but should instead be involved
31 in creating and running the system as a whole, conveying a deeper more sustained
32 form of participation. Note also that principles four and five place a heavy emphasis
33 on accessibility, including to advice and support. This commitment recognises that
34 successful claimant involvement can only be achieved if that involvement is actively
35 facilitated in various ways. How that might work in practice goes beyond the scope of
36 this article but debates around deliberative democracy, citizens' juries and a range of
37 other participatory decision-making processes offer helpful starting points (e.g. see
38 Smith and Wales, 2000).
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43 Finally, none of the principles established by the Experts by Experience can be
44 categorised under affordability. Affordability features prominently in the policymaker
45 generated principles considered in section 3. It is not the case that affordability was
46 absent from deliberations among the Experts by Experience. Concerns about how an
47 improved social security system would be paid for and sustained surfaced multiple
48 times in discussions, often with the concern that the public would be wary of proposals
49 if they were not also convinced of their affordability. However, these concerns and
50 discussions did not translate into affordability being conceptualised as an
51 underpinning principle that should guide the content of social security policy.
52 Affordability instead sat in parallel as an issue that might constrain the stated principles
53 and related policies being realised.
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56 **6. Discussion and conclusion: principles, content and process**

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58 Having presented the Expert by Experience generated principles and compared them
59 to existing 'top-down' principles, three further points merit particular emphasis, with
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3 the aim of advancing discussion in these areas. These are: 1) the importance of
4 principles as a normative guide for developing social security policy; 2) the content of
5 such principles and in particular, the relationship between the treatment of claimants
6 and benefit levels; and 3) the process by which the principles were arrived at,
7 supporting a holistic approach to social security policy. We consider these points in
8 turn.
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11 We want to make the point that principles, that is, clear value statements that can
12 underpin and guide the content of policy, offer us a way of articulating the direction
13 that social security policy should take. This focus addresses two current problems.
14 The first is that recent progressive policy proposals have lacked underpinning
15 principles. The second is that researchers are often involved in *descriptively* identifying
16 principles. The 'bottom-up' approach presented in this article offers a way of
17 generating normative principles to express how the social security system *should* be.
18 The approach we present stands in contrast to the (predominantly) top-down'
19 approaches that policymakers use to generate principles. The experiential knowledge
20 (McIntosh and Wright, 2019) of Experts by Experience is what gives them the
21 expertise and authority to formulate such principles and offers a possible way forward
22 among the progressive actors identified at the beginning of this article.
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26 We see, in turn, that this alternative approach arrives at principles that are radically
27 different to those put forward in contemporary policy proposals. As shown in section
28 5, the principles envision a system that ensures adequacy and is delivered with dignity
29 as part of a rights-based, accessible system in which claimants are involved and able
30 to obtain advice if required. In contrast, the Universal Credit principles place a strong
31 emphasis on social security that is conditional and a tool for encouraging or mandating
32 labour market participation. The Social Security Scotland Act principles share more in
33 common with the Expert by Experience generated ones. However, they are less
34 unequivocal in their formulation, and less clearly state what social security is *for*.
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38 What is particularly noteworthy, in terms of expressing what social security is for, is
39 the interplay between the treatment of claimants and the level of benefit payments in
40 the Expert by Experience generated principles. If a key principle underpinning the
41 system is to ensure that those in receipt of social security payments are worse off than
42 those in work (i.e. less eligibility), then this necessitates that payment levels will remain
43 low, particularly in a country like the UK with stagnating wages and low minimum wage
44 levels. A focus on labour market participation also gives rise to a system of
45 conditionality. These features dictate the treatment of claimants, with low payment
46 levels communicating disvalue, and conditionality communicating distrust. The Expert
47 by Experience generated principles express the converse of this, where adequate
48 payment levels go hand in hand with a system that values and trusts claimants.
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52 In turn, the relationship between benefit payment levels and the treatment of claimants
53 relate to the overarching goal of the social security system. The logic of the current
54 system means that reducing the number of claimants becomes a primary measure of
55 success. Low payment levels and conditionality form part of the architecture that
56 'incentivise' a transition away from claiming social security, including through labour
57 market participation. In contrast, the Expert by Experience principles place a heavy
58 emphasis on adequacy of payment levels, placing the primary focus on standard of
59 living. The goal under the latter set of principles, therefore, becomes the prevention
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3 and reduction of poverty, as opposed to the reduction in claimant numbers as under
4 the current system.
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7 Last, in terms of process, it is notable that the work of the Experts by Experience can
8 be described as holistic. Crossley, Garthwaite and Patrick (2019) recently argued that
9 representations of, and responses to, poverty in the UK are becoming increasingly
10 fragmented. We see campaigns against period poverty, food poverty, fuel poverty,
11 funeral poverty and so on. Crossley et al. (ibid.) contend that as the notion of poverty
12 becomes increasingly segmented, wider determinants of the distribution of resources
13 remain unproblematised and the scope to challenge them is therefore diminished. This
14 concern with fragmentation also applies to how people might be categorised or divided
15 up. Concern about poverty might be articulated with reference to one specific
16 demographic such as older people, children, single parents and so on. We see this
17 fragmentation reflected in the structure of civil society, where groups often represent
18 a specific type of person or poverty, meaning that priorities and solutions will differ
19 across organisations. The Experts by Experience avoided considering only one
20 element of need or one demographic group, demonstrating the unifying potential of a
21 bottom-up approach drawing on a range of participants with lived experience. The
22 principles they put forward are instead articulated at a level that engage with the social
23 security system in the round.
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28 To conclude, this article began by noting that Covid-19 has highlighted the inadequacy
29 of UK social security but also the lack of consensus amongst progressive actors as to
30 what would be a better system. A choice was posited between continued (fruitless)
31 debate about the rival merits of different proposals or instead focusing on principles
32 which should underpin social security policy solutions. The outcome of the research
33 project that has been presented demonstrates how a cogent expression of principles
34 does indeed provide a guide and framework for policy design. Rather than debate
35 about technical elements of rival policy proposals, consideration is reframed as to
36 which idea best achieves the principles without undermining others. Principles thereby
37 provide a bridge between ideals and policy solutions, making explicit what should
38 underpin and guide action and practice. The next step in this research agenda is to
39 trace how these principles translate into specific policy recommendations.
40
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43 The second question we posed was whether a bottom-up approach can be taken to
44 setting out social security principles? The answer to that is an emphatic 'yes'. The
45 avoidance of fragmentation and instead clarity of focus and holistic approach is striking
46 as is the explicit articulation of the relationship between the treatment of claimants and
47 benefit levels as intertwined. We noted above that outcomes from participatory
48 approaches can provide insights and knowledge which might otherwise be absent in
49 social policy debate and upset or challenge taken for granted narratives or
50 characterisations. The bottom-up approach we have discussed did exactly that. It
51 empowered claimants, undoubtedly addressed a 'big question' in society and provides
52 ways forward for policymakers and politicians alike. A bottom-up approach was not
53 only possible but led to a distinct and cogent contribution to the social security policy
54 debate.
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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the anonymous referees for their very helpful comments on the initial version of this paper.

Notes

1. Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/oct/21/marcus-rashford-in-despair-as-mps-reject-free-school-meal-plan>

2. Following the example of Hudson et al. (2016: 215-6), it is noted that the growing usage of the term 'welfare' has itself become part of pejorative political discourse, its usage implying social assistance for the poor, tied to the notion of 'dependency' and (quoting Lister, 2011) "This American import has not only besmirched the concept of welfare, but also displaced the term 'social security'". 'Welfare' may therefore have become the popular descriptor for social protection, mainstreamed in its usage by politicians, the media and, increasingly, academics, but it is a loaded and contested term. To reflect this, Hudson et al. (2016) adopt the convention of placing 'welfare' in inverted commas. The same approach is used in this article.

3. In seeking examples of principles beyond government efforts by civil society organisations are notable mainly for their absence. One exception is the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG). CPAG's principles for social security are not reproduced here because of their length (in excess of seven hundred words) but are available at <https://cpag.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/secure-futures-children-and-families#Principles>. CPAG's principles are wide ranging. They begin with three overarching points: preventing and reducing poverty, providing income security and promoting social solidarity, each of which is defined and then supported by twelve principles (four per overarching point). A separate heading on how the social security system should work provides a further six principles, giving a total of eighteen. The breadth of points covered is extensive and includes social security as helping with additional lifetime costs, supporting people to be able to work (in a way that suits their circumstances), recognising the value of unpaid care work, acting as an automatic stabiliser in times of economic uncertainty, redistributing income between individuals and households in a way that reduces inequalities of income and power, promoting social integration, promoting individual autonomy and having the trust and support of the public. Principles under the how the social security system should work heading contain several points similar to the Scottish example. For example, CPAG's principles include the system being simple, flexible and timely, empowering people to make choices rather than prescribing certain behaviour, treating people with dignity, ensuring that the voices of those who use the system and those who work in the system are heard, a meaningful right to independent advice, advocacy and representation, be rights-based and upholds the UK's obligations under human rights law, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. On the core issue of the level of benefits, CPAG's principles are not necessarily definitive. They state that social security should at a minimum provide adequate resources to protect people from poverty and eliminate destitution. But there is then a slightly ambiguous principle that social security should support people to achieve a decent level of income based on individual needs. Similarly, what recognising unpaid care work means could be

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3 more explicit. While many of CPAG's principles raise points of considerable interest in
4 terms of broader understanding of social security (e.g. social solidarity, inequalities of
5 income and power and so on) for the purposes of this article they do not necessarily
6 provide the required bridge between values and guiding action.
7

8
9 4. Our concern is with the principles as set out in the Universal Credit White Paper.
10 Other arguments were made in support of the introduction of Universal Credit, for
11 example that it would provide a much simpler system. Simplicity might potentially be
12 argued to be another underpinning principle but the concept is far from straightforward
13 as discussed in detail by Summers and Young (2020).
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16 5. Note also the interplay between a lack of commitment to poverty alleviation and a
17 work-first approach. It is a common refrain that 'work provides the best route out of
18 poverty' (see for example, Hansard, 2020). However, we have also observed long term
19 wage stagnation and relatively low minimum wage levels, meaning that work does not
20 offer a guaranteed exit from poverty (Cribb et al., 2021). Indeed, in-work poverty has
21 risen in the UK (Bourquin et al., 2019).
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Table 1: Contemporary social security principles – two examples

Category	<i>21st Century Welfare</i>	Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018
Less eligibility	(a) ensure that people can see that the clear rewards from taking all types of work outweigh the risks	(does not feature)
	(b) further incentivise and encourage households and families to move into work and to increase the amount of work they do, by improving the rewards from work at low earnings, helping them keep more of their earnings as they work harder	
Dignity	(does not feature)	(a) social security is an investment in the people of Scotland
		(b) social security is itself a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights
		(c) the delivery of social security is a public service
		(d) respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system
		(g) opportunities are to be sought to continuously improve the Scottish social security system in ways which — (i) put the needs of those who require assistance first, and (ii) advance equality and non-discrimination
Deservingness	(c) increase fairness between different groups of benefit recipients and between recipients and taxpayers	(does not feature)
	(d) promote responsibility and positive behaviour, doing more to reward saving, strengthening the family and, in tandem with improving incentives, reinforcing conditionality	
	(d) promote responsibility and positive behaviour, doing more to reward saving, strengthening the	

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	family and, in tandem with improving incentives, reinforcing conditionality	
	(f) automate processes and maximise self-service, to reduce the scope for fraud, error and overpayments. This could include a responsive and immediate service that saves the taxpayer significant amounts of money and ensures compliance costs for employers, at worst, are no worse than under the current system	
Security	(e) continue to support those most in need and ensure that interactions with other systems of support for basic needs are considered	(e) the Scottish social security system is to contribute to reducing poverty in Scotland
Affordability	(g) ensure that the benefits and Tax Credits system is affordable in the short and longer term	(h) the Scottish social security system is to be efficient and deliver value for money.
Claimant Involvement	(does not feature)	(f) the Scottish social security system is to be designed with the people of Scotland on the basis of evidence

Compiled from 21st Century Welfare (DWP, 2010) and the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018 (letters in brackets indicate the ordering in the original documents).

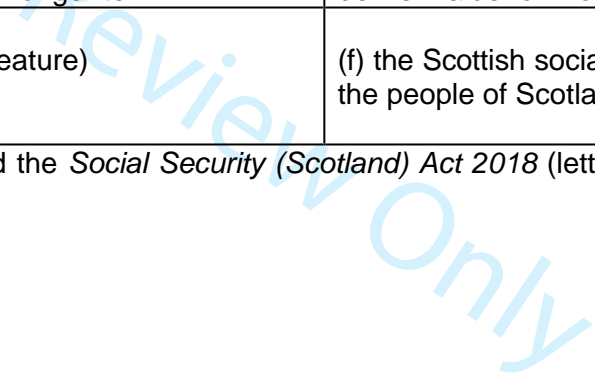


Table 2: Summary of Expert by Experience characteristics (voluntary responses, i.e. not all 16 participants submitted responses)

Lived experience of the following benefits since 2010		Ethnicity		Age Group		Gender	
Child Tax Credit	2	White British	5	25-34	3	Female	5
Housing Benefit	5	White Irish	1	35-44	1	Male	5
Income Support	1	Other White	2	45-54	3	Other (inc. Transgender)	1
Jobseekers Allowance	3	Black/ Black British	1	55-64	3		
Employment and Support Allowance	8	Black/Black British Caribbean	1				
Working Tax Credit	3						
Other (open response)	Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment, Severe Disablement Allowance, Universal Credit, Access to Work						

Note: Participants were primarily, though not exclusively, renters and not in paid employment. They included single people, single parents and members of couples both with and without children.

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Table 3: 'Top-down' principles in comparison to the 'Bottom-up' Expert by Experience generated principles

Category	21st Century Welfare	Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018	Expert by Experience generated principles
Less eligibility	(a) ensure that people can see that the clear rewards from taking all types of work outweigh the risks	(does not feature)	(does not feature)
	(b) further incentivise and encourage households and families to move into work and to increase the amount of work they do, by improving the rewards from work at low earnings, helping them keep more of their earnings as they work harder		
Dignity	(does not feature)	(a) social security is an investment in the people of Scotland	(b) Treat everyone with dignity, respect and trust, and the belief that people should be able to choose for themselves.
		(b) social security is itself a human right and essential to the realisation of other human rights	
		(c) the delivery of social security is a public service	
		(d) respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system	
		(g) opportunities are to be sought to continuously improve the Scottish social security system in ways which — (i) put the needs of those who require assistance first, and (ii) advance equality and non-discrimination	

Deservingness	(c) increase fairness between different groups of benefit recipients and between recipients and taxpayers	(does not feature)	(does not feature)
	(d) promote responsibility and positive behaviour, doing more to reward saving, strengthening the family and, in tandem with improving incentives, reinforcing conditionality		
	(d) promote responsibility and positive behaviour, doing more to reward saving, strengthening the family and, in tandem with improving incentives, reinforcing conditionality		
	(f) automate processes and maximise self-service, to reduce the scope for fraud, error and overpayments. This could include a responsive and immediate service that saves the taxpayer significant amounts of money and ensures compliance costs for employers, at worst, are no worse than under the current system		
Security	(e) continue to support those most in need and ensure that interactions with other systems of support for basic needs are considered	(e) the Scottish social security system is to contribute to reducing poverty in Scotland	(a) Make sure everyone has enough money to live – and support extra costs e.g. to do with disability and children. (c) Be a public service with rights and entitlements.
Affordability	(g) ensure that the benefits and Tax Credits system is affordable in the short and longer term	(h) the Scottish social security system is to be efficient and deliver value for money.	(does not feature)

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Claimant Involvement	(does not feature)	(f) the Scottish social security system is to be designed with the people of Scotland on the basis of evidence	(d) Be clear, simple, user friendly and accessible to all, involving people who have actual experience of the issues, including from all impairment groups, in creating and running the system as a whole. (e) Include access to free advice and support. Make sure people can access support to speak up, be heard or make a complaint.
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