



Dr David Littlefair and Dr Joanne Atkinson, Deputy and Head of Department for Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing at Northumbria are joined by researchers, Professor Matthew Johnson, Dr Howard Reed, Dr Elliott Johnson and Dr Graham Stark.

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New research will examine the use of welfare reform to tackle health inequalities

As debate over changes to Britain's welfare system continues to dominate the news, members of a multidisciplinary team of researchers are beginning a two-year study to examine the case for transformative welfare policy and the impact on public health outcomes.

Led by public policy researchers at Northumbria University and funded by the

[National Institute for Health and Care Research \(NIHR\)](#), the study brings together experts in economics, behavioural science, health history and epidemiology to carry out analysis of a growing body of research which suggests establishing a universal support system to provide people with more financial certainty could have a positive effect on mental and physical health, [while saving the NHS money](#).

One option for reform is the introduction of a Basic Income, which is a regular cash payment from government to all citizens, regardless of whether they are in employment or how much they earn. However, while policies like Basic Income have been the subject of several localised pilots, they have yet to be trialled nationally in Britain. As a result, policymakers require new types of evidence on impact to determine whether the costs and benefits to public health add up.

Leading academics from the universities of Northumbria, York, Warwick, Strathclyde, Birmingham and University College London (UCL), are now working to establish the latest evidence for government and policymakers in the study titled, [Examining credibility of current evidence for welfare as a public health measure: pathways, causation and cost benefit of further research](#).

[Matthew Johnson, Professor of Public Policy](#) at Northumbria University and research group Chair of the [Common Sense Policy Group](#), said: "At a time in which there is a real need to support government in taking the difficult decisions it needs to take in order to resolve our era of crisis, this award is remarkable: the NIHR is supporting a programme of research examining the possibility of reversing decades of direction in social security policy by introducing regular payments to British citizens, including those in work.

"This bold award provides an opportunity for an interdisciplinary panel of experts to interrogate thinking on this topic: Are estimates for potential impacts of Basic Income schemes correct? Might there be more or less impact than projections currently suggest? How might our assumptions of impact change when we are forced to consider as potential biases the social, disciplinary and ideological framings of our thinking? The outcome of this project will be a much clearer assessment of whether and in what ways we might promote public health through a reformed social security system."

The study will use expert panels and surveys of public opinion on welfare

policies alongside economic modelling and analysis to generate a new body of evidence on options for reform. Findings will then be incorporated into an interactive microsimulation model known as the [Triple PC: Public Policy Preference Calculator](#). This allows individual policies to be assessed on economic and health impact, as well as popularity among the public.

[Dr Howard Reed](#), Senior Research Fellow in Public Policy at Northumbria and Economics Lead for the Common Sense Policy Group, said: "Discussion of social security reform almost always focuses on significant costs. The long-term benefits of that reform are generally overlooked, with the potential health impacts of transformative public policy poorly understood within economics. This project presents an opportunity to upgrade economic understanding of the impact of social security reform, casting new light on the way in which changing rates of poverty and inequality has an effect on public health."

[Dr Elliott Johnson](#), a Vice Chancellor's Fellow in Public Policy at Northumbria and Impact Lead for the Common Sense Policy Group, said: "Government faces myriad pressures on its thinking at present. Budgets are strained and there is understandable concern about making largescale investment in social security given the associated necessity of reforming tax, particularly on wealth. Yet, this is an opportunity to support a new government in taking a bold, but necessary step, toward assessing options for national renewal. This will give us the ability to put a figure on the cost of doing nothing."

Research which informs how policymakers might review existing welfare programmes or adopt and deploy basic income schemes is at the heart of activity from the team of researchers, led by Professor Johnson, at Northumbria University. Whilst being involved in evaluating a Basic Income pilot for young people leaving care in Wales, Northumbria researchers have also supported a research [report presented to Greater Manchester Mayor, Andy Burnham, which outlines a plan for a Basic Income pilot](#) in the city. In 2023, they carried out extensive research and community consultation exercises, in partnership with communities in Jarrow, South Tyneside and East Finchley, London to develop [community-led proposals for a two-year Basic Income pilot](#) on a smaller scale.

As well as publishing reports on [regional transport policy, democratic reform and the use of Radical Prevention Funds](#), the Northumbria team have also led the development of a blueprint for policy reform aimed at bringing an end to

poverty and inequality in Britain. [Act Now: A vision for a better future and a new social contract](#) was published as a book before last year's General Election. A second book, [Basic Income: The Policy That Changes Everything](#), is due to be published later this year.

Northumbria University is dedicated to reducing health and social inequalities, contributing to the regional and national workforce and improving social, economic and health outcomes for the most marginalised in society. Through its new [Centre for Health and Social Equity](#), known as CHASE, researchers will be delivering world-leading health and social equity research and creating innovative, evidence-based policies and data-driven solutions to bring impactful change across the region, the UK and globally.

[Dr Joanne Atkinson](#), Head of Department for [Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing](#) at Northumbria University, added: "This NIHR funding award is fundamental to expanding the Common Sense Policy Group's work and contributing to the Centre for Health and Social Equity as Northumbria strives to create world-leading knowledge that drives social mobility and powers an inclusive economy. This is an example of how high-quality interdisciplinary research on the key issues of our age can inform discussions on national policy."

Ends

Notes to editors

Image caption: Dr David Littlefair and Dr Joanne Atkinson, Deputy and Head of Department for Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing at Northumbria University are joined by public policy researchers, Professor Matthew Johnson, Dr Howard Reed, Dr Elliott Johnson and Dr Graham Stark.

About NIHR:

The mission of the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research.

We do this by:

- funding high quality, timely research that benefits the NHS,

- public health and social care
- investing in world-class expertise, facilities and a skilled delivery workforce to translate discoveries into improved treatments and services
- partnering with patients, service users, carers and communities, improving the relevance, quality and impact of our research
- attracting, training and supporting the best researchers to tackle complex health and social care challenges
- collaborating with other public funders, charities and industry to help shape a cohesive and globally competitive research system
- funding applied global health research and training to meet the needs of the poorest people in low and middle income countries

NIHR is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care.

Our work in low and middle income countries is principally funded through UK international development funding from the UK government.

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Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, demonstrating Northumbria's significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk

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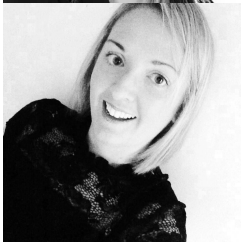
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