



Department  
for Education



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Measuring Child Poverty: A Consultation on Better Measures of Child Poverty

## Consultation Response Form

The closing date for this consultation is: 15  
February 2013

Your comments must reach us by that date.

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the access to information regimes, primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998.

If you want all, or any part, of your response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

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The Department will process your personal data (name and address and any other identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

**Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential.**

Reason for confidentiality:

Name Nushra Mansuri  
Organisation (if applicable) British Association of Social Workers  
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Birmingham  
B5 6RD

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can telephone: 0370 000 2288 or e-mail:

[Measure.CONSULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Measure.CONSULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk)

If you have a query relating to the consultation process you can contact the CYPFD Team by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the Department's ['Contact Us'](#) page.

Please select the category that best describes you as a respondent.

<input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary and community sector	<input type="checkbox"/> Local authority	<input type="checkbox"/> Practitioner working with children/families
<input type="checkbox"/> Central Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Research body/academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Public bodies and named partners in the Child Poverty Act
<input type="checkbox"/> Family/organisation representing families and children	<input type="checkbox"/> Social enterprise	X Other

Please Specify: BASW is the UK professional association for social work, led by and accountable to a growing population of approximately 14,500 social worker members. Our members work in frontline, management, research and academic positions in all social work settings across the UK. BASW members share a collective commitment to those values and principles that will secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people, adults, families and communities.

## SECTION TWO: POTENTIAL DIMENSIONS

1 Are there dimensions, other than those proposed in the consultation document, we should consider for inclusion in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

X Yes

No

Not Sure

As a UK Association, we have taken particular note of the complexities of this consultation in that it refers to the UK dimension and that state benefits are still the responsibility of the UK government, but that many of the 'dimensions' referred to are in the jurisdiction of the devolved Parliaments and Assemblies. As different social policies are developed across the UK by the different governments an important part of the development of indices will be comparative research across the jurisdictions as different measures to combat child poverty are implemented.

The document does not mention those children and families who fall into the 'reserved' UK Government jurisdiction who have no recourse to public funds, usually as a result of their immigration status. It is vital that these children are not marginalised and discounted as they clearly are living in poverty and in extreme cases, destitution. The recent report of the **parliamentary inquiry into asylum support for children and young people** brings their plight into sharp focus.

The consultation document does not include the category of homeless families and young people (particularly care leavers) – those living in temporary accommodation - which we believe since the economic downturn is on the increase, sadly.

The increase in the use of kinship carers for children and the differing support across the UK from Local Authorities is potentially leading to another group in financial hardship.

Finally, it is important to consider the impact of poverty on families where a parent is serving a prison sentence.

## DIMENSION 1: INCOME AND MATERIAL DEPRIVATION

2 a) How should we measure income as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

It is vitally important that income is not downplayed as a dimension of child poverty. Data needs to reflect the numbers of families in receipt of state benefits and some more sophisticated measure distinguishing those with long term health conditions or those looking for employment.

Families with restricted support as a result of for example, their immigration status must also be included in the data.

We need to determine how many families are on the minimum wage. Sadly despite the rhetoric, work does not pay for all families given that there are some who have at least one working parent in the household but are still living in poverty.

2 b) How important is relative and absolute income?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

Firstly, the terms need to be broken down so they are easily and widely accessible and understood by the public at large, otherwise there is a danger that they are misunderstood and misinterpreted.

BASW is a member of the End Child Poverty (ECP) campaigning group and we support their assertion that the after housing cost measure is used when referring to the total number of children living in poverty across the UK otherwise we are not getting an accurate representation of the numbers of children living in poverty given that housing costs can be very high and once taken into account, leave many families struggling to meet their basic needs. The poverty line means that, after housing costs, all the household bills and family's spending needs will need to be met by around £12 or less per family member per day. For many families, especially those reliant on out of work benefits, it can be substantially less.

Rural poverty is particularly affected by the high cost of transport and fuel particularly when there is no public transport system.

3 How does the ownership of assets such as a house affect our understanding of poverty?

Comments:

When categorising individuals and groups, it is important not to adopt a broad brush approach as by merely demarcating someone as a homeowner can mask their real situation which could be one of severe financial hardship. A qualitative approach is therefore needed as well as a quantitative one.

This is particular significant in rural communities – for example, Crofts in the Highlands of Scotland.

4 How can an income dimension in a multidimensional measure of child poverty avoid the drawbacks associated with a simple income threshold?

Comments:

It needs to be contextualised, accompanied by proper analysis and disaggregation.

Many factors affect poverty and the environment in which children and their families live, for example winter heating costs in the north of Scotland are significantly different from the south east of England where the availability of the gas and electricity infrastructure gives choice and competition to home heating that is denied in rural areas.

## **DIMENSION 2: WORKLESSNESS**

5 How important is worklessness as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Very important

X Important

Slightly important

Not important

Not sure

It is obviously key to look at the dimension of worklessness in respect of child poverty, particularly with the cuts to welfare benefits as a result of the welfare reform programme. Unfortunately, families difficulties are often exacerbated by the 'knock on' effect of changes in social policy i.e. tightening eligibility criteria for benefits, changes in social housing policy such as the 'bedroom' tax, reduced availability of advocacy and support services as a result of cuts to public services etc. Worklessness of course is not necessarily an 'absolute' in people's lives. Some people may only be able to secure temporary or part-time work making their existence in the job market uncertain and unstable. They may therefore, be prone to regular bouts of 'worklessness' and arguably, short term contracts may do little to improve their overall income as in this scenario it is never really sustainable.

Research in Scotland has demonstrated that when there is an increase in women who are in work the level of child poverty goes down but we are also aware that there are many women on low incomes who are being disadvantaged by the cuts to child tax credits and tax credits.

6 How should worklessness be measured?

Worklessness needs to take into account the environment in which a person lives, i.e. areas that are classified as 'socially deprived'. It needs to consider accessibility and transport costs to work to ensure that going to work or being employed actually brings positive benefit to the individual and family rather than leading to deprivation.

7 Does the length of time for which a household is workless matter for measurement?

Yes

No

Not Sure

It is important to differentiate between those households who are not in work for the long term compared to those who may find themselves in this position for a temporary period and compare their life chances and outcomes. It is essential that social policy is informed by a sound evidence base.

Where two and three generations have been unable to find work following the collapse of mining and manufacturing in areas like Wales, the north of England or Scotland the lack of re-generation investment in these populous areas has resulted in endemic poverty for families left behind in the re-shaping of the economy across the UK. This has resulted in the increasing gap between the wealthy and the poor.

The comparison of regeneration initiatives across the UK would give information about the significance of the length of time without work has long term on the incidence of poverty.

### **DIMENSION 3: UNMANAGEABLE DEBT**

8 How important is unmanageable debt as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

Very important

Important

Slightly important

Not important

Not sure

The consultation quite rightly identifies the pernicious effect unscrupulous money lenders such as payday loan companies are having in the lives of the most vulnerable. This is certainly borne out by the experience of our members who work with vulnerable adults who are often preyed upon by these companies, which inevitably traps them in a vicious circle of spiralling debt which they feel they can never be free of given that their options to obtain credit are so limited. It is a sad indictment of our times to see so many high streets dominated by money lenders; this has very much become the 'norm' and an indicator of the severity of the problem. Surely, there needs to be much greater control and regulation over these money lenders so that vulnerable people can be protected and alternatively, other options can be made available to them such as credit unions.

9 What aspects of unmanageable debt should we be most concerned about capturing?

Refer to the above. Equally, low income families are also more likely to have gas and electric token meters to pay for their consumption of fuel and this again, can leave them vulnerable if they cannot afford to keep the meters in credit. The tokens are in themselves a more expensive way of buying fuel which is discriminatory. There must be a more humane and fair system put in place to help those on the lowest incomes to meet their basic needs for lighting, heating, cooking, washing etc.

#### **DIMENSION 4: POOR HOUSING**

10 How important is poor housing as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

Again, the experience of social workers is that poor housing has a major impact on all aspects of a family's ability to function. It has an impact on their health, education, social mobility etc. As already stated, this category needs to also include those families and young people who are homeless and living in temporary accommodation. Furthermore, with the decrease in availability of social housing it is also important that the Government scrutinises the legislation pertaining to private landlords to ensure that tenants have adequate protections and that social policy does not provide perverse incentives that can be exploited by unprincipled landlords.

In a recession, expenditure on repairing and maintaining property in good condition declines and more families are forced to live in deteriorating environments which links to increases in expenditure on health particularly respiratory as well as other conditions.

11 What aspect of poor housing should be captured in a measure?

Please include the category of homelessness and indeed the quality of provision in terms of temporary accommodation for families such as bed and breakfast, hostels etc. We need to pay particular attention to 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless, care leavers, young people leaving custody, children, young people and families who suffer destitution as a result of being subject to immigration controls.

As fuel and transport costs rise we should also include a separate section on rural poverty. Again, comparison across the UK with initiatives to help with insulation and heating costs would indicate what measures are effective in alleviating poverty.

12 How can we consider the impact of where children grow up when measuring child poverty?

It is extremely important that we consider the variation in outcomes of individuals living in various parts of the country i.e. infant mortality rates, life expectancy, health inequalities, educational attainment, employment, housing etc. We know only too well that social deprivation can be easily identified in certain localities, for example, which parts of the country have the highest children in need population. The ECP produced an excellent document last year **Child Poverty Map of the UK** which clearly identifies which areas are prone to the severest social deprivation. Historically, we can also learn lessons from what has happened to areas that were traditionally poor and have been transformed by neighbourhood renewal and evaluate what difference that has made.

The implementation of the GIRFEC model in Scotland measures a child's well-being on the criteria – safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included. One of the negative factors is peer and community isolation. Poverty is a key factor in these criteria as it impacts negatively on the child's health and development.

## DIMENSION 5: PARENTAL SKILL LEVEL

13 a) How important is parental skill level as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> X Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

Whilst we concur that it is important to recognise how an individual's functioning may be impaired by a learning disability or mental health condition, we must also exercise some caution in not just considering this dimension in isolation. We also need to pose the question how enabling or discriminatory is our society towards the aforementioned.

In a time of austerity, there can be a tendency to pathologise the individual and ignore structural inequality; this in turn, perpetuates negative stereotypes and fuels the 'blame' culture. It is critical therefore, that policies are properly impact assessed particularly in terms of equalities. This dimension raises wider issues such as the effectiveness of the government and whether employers are adhering to equality legislation which is particularly, relevant to public bodies that have statutory duties to employ people with disabilities. We also need to take into account that the opportunities for adults to develop their skill levels

may also be restricted by cuts in the provision of adult education.

Bob Holman over many years has demonstrated through his research the impact of the environment on people's outcomes. There is a great deal of evidence from community social work initiatives; the work of Neil Thomson illustrates how significant environmental factors are. In the International Definition of Social Work (2004) understanding the significance of the environment is fundamental to helping people make changes in their lives.

13 b) What level of skills matter?

Comments: From a social work perspective it is important that individuals have some proficiency in life skills and employment skills whether they be academic, vocational etc. Again, we need to appraise what support and opportunities are available to individuals to improve their skills.

The ability to make and sustain relationships .....having the space and support to do this.....

14 How can we best capture parental skill level in a new child poverty measure?

Good parenting is based on the quality of the relationship between the adults and the children. This is achieved through confidence that is nurtured by their own experiences of being parented, the support of the extended family and community and their own sense of well-being. Stressed adults tend to have limited emotional and physical energy for parenting and this can be exacerbated by financial stress, concern about employment or the environment in which they live. Social Workers take all these factors into consideration when assessing the risk factors surrounding a child and whether the parenting being offered is good enough to enable the child to be healthy and develop their potential.

## DIMENSION 6: ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

15 What impact does attending a failing school have on a child's experience of poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Significant impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Some impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Little impact
<input type="checkbox"/> No impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

There is an abundance of research that demonstrates the value bought about by a good level of education and formal qualifications. Negative experiences of school can be profound and effectively write an individual off into their adult life. Many adults feel stigmatised, embarrassed and suffer from low self-esteem as a result of this and inevitably have poorer life chances. It is important to note that educational attainment was one of the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda and rightly so. We are concerned that with the growth of academies, in England, this is likely to cause an even greater divide between those who have access to a good education and those who do not.

GIRFEC in Scotland places considerable significance on the role of education and is a key in the Early Years Strategy being implemented by Scottish Government and initiatives in other jurisdictions should be evaluated across the UK to identify key positive interventions.

16 What impact does attending a failing school have on a child's life chances?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Significant impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Some impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Little impact
<input type="checkbox"/> No impact	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

The school is part of the environment in which a child attains their full potential. A failing school, especially where it has been intergenerational, is a key factor in preventing children make the most of their life chances. It is one factor amongst a number of others and some of the work, for example in the Gorbals in Glasgow, using asset based methods with young people shows the importance of community work and interventions.

17 How should access to quality education be measured?

It is important to consider the education system as a whole i.e. private schools, state schools, academies, those outside of the lea – it is an increasingly mixed economy. How many options do those on low incomes have compared to the more affluent in society? Indeed how do we define 'access' in such circumstances?

## **DIMENSION 7: FAMILY STABILITY**

18 How important is family stability as a dimension in a future multidimensional measure of child poverty?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very important	<input type="checkbox"/> Important	<input type="checkbox"/> Slightly important
<input type="checkbox"/> Not important	<input type="checkbox"/> Not sure	

The incidence of family breakdown and ensuing crisis is very much the core business of social workers. Sadly, many of these situations are characterised by familial abuse, whether it be domestic abuse and/or child abuse. This as we know has a devastating impact on children and families.

However, once again, we would argue that in respect of this dimension we take care not to pathologise certain families. We live in an increasingly diverse society where there is more than one type of family composition and children can do well in situations that do not necessarily conform to the nuclear family structure particularly with the right support etc. We should not be working from a deficit model.

We are certainly seeing a growing number of children being looked after by extended family members or friends and their needs for financial supports are often not sufficiently addressed.

19 How important is the long term involvement of both parents to their child's experience of poverty and life chances?

Very important      X Important       Slightly important  
 Not important       Not sure

It is of course desirable that wherever possible both parents are involved with bringing up their children whether they are together or separated but we have to take into account that in some circumstances this would not be ideal i.e. where there has been extensive child abuse and/or domestic violence. In these situations, the long term involvement of an abusive parent could be detrimental to a child.

20 How important is the presence of a father to a child's experience of poverty and life chances?

Very important      X Important       Slightly important

Not important

Not sure

As stated above, it is desirable but not always ideal. It is interesting that the consultation document also recognised that following separation women were also in many cases left worse off financially whilst some men were better off. This clearly needs to be addressed through an effective system that secures child maintenance payments for children as this is clearly not happening in all separated families.

21 Which experiences associated with family stability should be captured in a measure?

This is difficult to quantify. Listening to children and young people, they are sometimes so relieved to not have contact with an abusive parent given that they can at last feel safe enough to start growing and developing. For others however, they may still want some contact but for need it to be safe (supervised). This might suggest that some qualitative measures need to be considered in looking at the support for children and their families as suggested in the GIRFEC initiative.

## **DIMENSION 8: PARENTAL HEALTH**

22 How should we recognise young carers in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

It is essential that this group of young people are captured in the multidimensional measure of poverty as they are so often overlooked. We know that young carers experience limitations in their school, home and social lives in comparison to their peers. It is not just about alleviation of financial constraints but also it is about building social capital in the lives of these young people.

This is an area where sometimes young carers feel torn between caring for a parent and their own needs not only to develop but also for their own safety.

23 How should we recognise parental drug and alcohol dependence and mental health conditions in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

We need to consider through research proportionately what impact this has on children living in such households. Again, addiction to substances is a very common feature in the families social workers come across but that is not to say that the prognosis is identical for all children in these families.

We consider mental health conditions to be in a separate category from drug and alcohol dependency although of course, some of these dimensions will be interlinked.

24 How can parental disability and general poor parental health be reflected in a multidimensional measure of child poverty?

We certainly need to see proportionately the number of families with parental disability or living with long term health conditions who are affected by poverty. In our estimation, this would be a significant number of these families. This corresponds to children in need data which includes families where disability and health are issues for either the child or the parents or both. In our view, significant needs must be captured so these children and families can be appropriately supported as they have an entitlement but this of course, is not always their reality.

### SECTION 3: CREATING A MULTIDIMENSIONAL MEASURE

25 Are there criteria, other than those listed in Section 3 of the consultation document, that we should evaluate a new measure against?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Those subject to immigration controls and/or have no recourse to public funds.  
Homeless families and young people.  
Families where parents are/have served prison sentences.  
Young people who have left custody.  
Families and carers of children who are not the birth parents.

26 In creating a new measure should any dimension be a gateway?

Yes

No

Not Sure

This needs some expansion. Arguably, all the dimensions need gateways to lift children and families out of poverty.

27 Should the indicators be weighted and, if so, what factors should influence the choice of weighting?

Yes

No

Not Sure

It is important to assess the indicators on a case by case basis as the individual family circumstances would dictate which factor should have the greatest weighting. It cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach.

28 Which indicators should be weighted more or less?

There is a danger of doing the above by weighting the indicators and creating a hierarchy. It has long been argued when looking at discrimination and inequality that we should not create a hierarchy of oppressions that would demean some and exalt others. As previously stated, it will depend on which indicators individuals find the most challenging in their lives.

29 How could we measure child poverty at the local level?

We urge you to consider the ECP Child Poverty Map which makes an excellent case for how to do this effectively.

We also commend the report - Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion in Scotland 2013 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

30 How should we check the robustness and simplicity?

Genuine community engagement and user involvement and participation are essential prerequisites in measuring robustness and simplicity.

31 What would you use a multidimensional measure of child poverty for?

To improve social policy, focus on meeting the needs of those most vulnerable and disadvantaged in society and to re-energise commitment to eradicating child poverty in the UK. Poor families in the UK should not be left resigned to their fate – we need to work on the basis of creating a fairer and more just society. **“It is a political choice whether the cost of balancing the budget falls most heavily on the poorest or the wealthiest. The decision made to place the greater burden on the poorest – revealed in the Treasury’s income distribution analysis for tax and benefit changes published with the Autumn Statement 2011 – not only puts children’s wellbeing at risk, it carries economic risks too. Child poverty already costs the UK economy around £25 billion a year; any rise in child poverty will push up this cost.”** (Child Poverty Map of the UK 2012)

32 Please use this space for any other comments you would like to make.

It is essential that the UK government works with all jurisdictions across the UK in the complex area of working with some UK policy areas and some devolved areas.

There is a great opportunity for jurisdictions and policy makers to learn about what works for children and their families and produce coherent policies. They need to build on strategies introduced by the previous and alternative administrations rather than simply berating them for their shortcomings. The plethora and rhetoric about early years programme which is currently under consultation need to be replaced by examination of the evidence, taken away from the political football arena, and seen as a legacy to build on if we want to improve the life chances of the future generation of children at risk of poverty.

33 Please let us have your views on responding to this consultation (e.g. the number and type of questions, whether it was easy to find, understand, complete etc.).

This has not been an easy consultation in that it crosses over between UK and devolved responsibilities. It then focuses solely on the English situation without further reference to the rest of the UK for whom the actual Child Poverty Act 2010 applies.

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge individual responses unless you place an 'X' in the box below.

**Please acknowledge this reply**

Here at the Department for Education we carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, would it be alright if we were to contact you again from time to time either for research or to send through consultation documents?

XYes

 No

All DfE public consultations are required to meet the Cabinet Office [Principles on Consultation](#)

The key Consultation Principles are:

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.

Responses should be emailed to the relevant consultation email box. However, if you have any comments on how DfE consultations are conducted, please contact Carole Edge, DfE Consultation Coordinator, tel: 0370 000 2288 / email: [carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:carole.edge@education.gsi.gov.uk)

**Thank you for taking time to respond to this consultation.**

Completed questionnaires and other responses should be sent to the address shown below by 15 February 2013.

Send by post to: CYPFD Team, Department for Education, Area 1C, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire WA7 2GJ or email to: [Measure.CONULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Measure.CONULTATION@childpovertyunit.gsi.gov.uk)