



A Minimum Income Standard for Britain

CRSP has recently completed work with colleagues from the University of York to develop a Minimum Income Standard for Britain.

The project, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, brought together the expertise of CRSP and the Family Budget Unit (FBU) in order to answer the question 'What level of income is needed to allow an acceptable standard of living?'

The study drew on two methodologies used previously to determine budget standards in the UK – the 'consensual' methodology, based on group discussions among members of the public, which was pioneered at CRSP, and the expert-led approach used by the University of York's Family Budget Unit (FBU). It involved more than 200 people, who came together in 39 groups. Each group was made up of individuals from the type of household under discussion and from a range of income backgrounds. Through in-depth conversations and day-long workshops, the groups then drew up detailed lists of what would be required by different household types, including food, clothes, fuel, household goods, transport, and social and cultural activities.

The research captured the consensus reached among ordinary people about what they felt is needed to achieve an acceptable standard of living today. The groups were made up of representatives of the different kinds of households (such as families with children, pensioners and single people), and took part in detailed discussions about the necessary elements of a household budget. Experts looked at these budgets to ensure that they provided an adequate diet and met basic needs like keeping a home warm. In this way it was possible to support the focus groups' work by drawing on the knowledge of experts and so make the research more robust. The 'minimum income standard', is therefore based on the extensive deliberations of ordinary people with input from experts, and shows the cost of covering basic goods and services for different household types (see Figure 1).

Groups themselves helped to construct a definition of what a minimum acceptable standard of living should be. They agreed that in addition to the elements required for basic survival, in



today's society it was essential for people to be able to have choices that enabled them to interact with others. The focus of the discussion groups throughout the project was on 'needs' and not 'wants'. They concluded that:

'A minimum standard of living in Britain today includes, but is more than, just, food, clothes and shelter. It is about having what you need in order to have the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society.'

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Findings showed that:

- A single person without children would need £158 a week, and a couple with two children would need £370 a week, not including rent or mortgage.
- To afford this budget on top of rent on a modest council home, the single person would need to earn £13,400 a year and the couple with two children would need £26,800.
- For families with no adult working, state benefits provide for less than half the minimum budget for single people and around two-thirds for those with children. The basic state pension provides a retired couple with about three-quarters of the minimum, but if they claim the means-tested Pension Credit their income is topped up to just above the minimum income standard.
- The minimum income is above the official “poverty line” of 60% median income, for nearly all household groups. This shows that almost everybody classified as being in poverty has income too low to pay for a standard of living regarded as “adequate” by all members of the public who took part in this research.

For example, the groups agreed that:

- families with school age children needed computers in the home, but only secondary school children needed home access to the internet;
- cheap pay-as-you-go mobile phones were a cost effective way of keeping in touch. These were included by groups for all adults and the secondary school aged child;
- DVD players provided a cheap source of entertainment in the home and should therefore be included;
- washing machines were considered essential, and more cost-effective than using launderettes, however, tumble driers were not included in any of the budgets;
- cars were not an essential item for everyone in Britain, so money for public transport and taxis was included, however, groups realised that this might not be sufficient for those living in rural areas.

The findings from the study are relevant for those who influence rates of income (earnings and the minimum wage, tax credits and benefits, etc), for those who assess the affordability of, for example, utilities, debt repayments or fines set by courts, and for all those interested in fairness and welfare in Britain. The work is already contributing to debates and discussions about poverty in Britain among policy makers and campaign groups, as well as among the general public.

While 90% of the items in the budgets were priced at large retailers with national pricing policies, some items, like housing costs, are highly variable. In order to address this there is an online ‘ready reckoner’ available on the website, into which people can enter their own housing, fuel, and other variable costs and generate a minimum budget much more individually tailored to their own household.

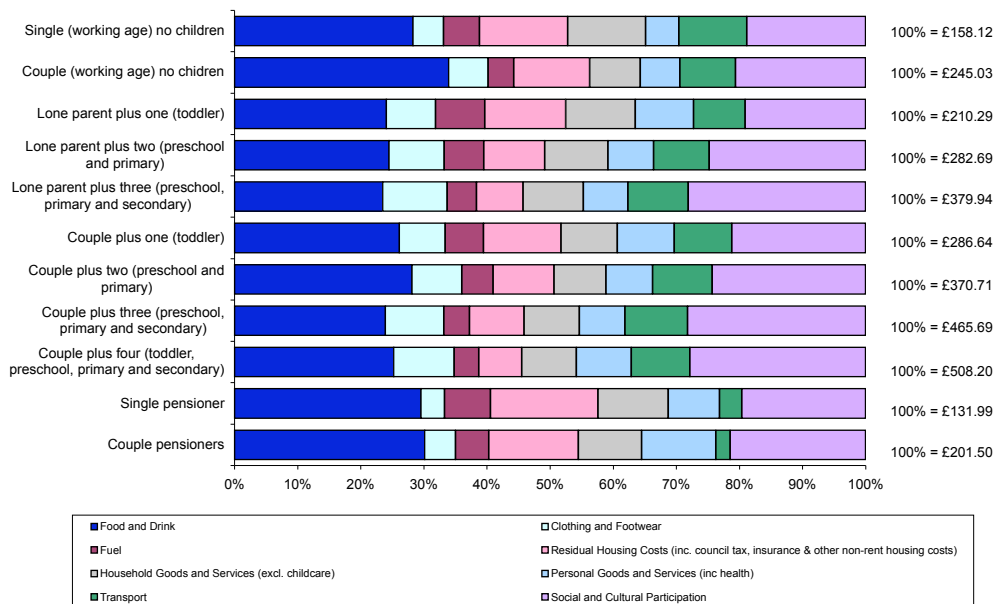
More detailed information on the composition of the budgets can be found at: www.minimumincomestandard.org/ready_reckoner.htm

Since its launch in the summer, the minimum income standard has attracted wide-spread interest and much debate, generating, in three days, more than 2,000 vox pop comments on the BBC web site. Among the findings of the research, some gained particular media attention.

Now that the project is complete the team are keen to build on their success and extend the research, with proposed work to be carried out in Northern Ireland and rural areas. There is also an intention to explore the possibilities for collaboration further afield among the European Community, following interest in the methodology as the project progressed.

For further information, contact: minimumincomestandard@lboro.ac.uk or go online at: www.minimumincomestandard.org

Figure 1: Minimum Income Standard Budgets for 2008



Notes: All totals exclude rent and childcare costs.

Disadvantage and Road User Safety

It is well established that more people are injured on the road in disadvantaged areas than in other areas.

In order to meet its target of halving the number of children killed or injured in road accidents, the Government is prioritising a focus on reducing accidents in disadvantaged areas and among children from different social and ethnic groups. However, it's not clear why such risks are more pronounced for disadvantaged groups.

The Department for Transport has commissioned CRSP, in partnership with Faber Maunsell, to undertake a major study to inform strategies to improve road user safety. CRSP's role is to explore how people see and experience risks in their community using a range of qualitative methods. The research started in March 2008 and will continue into 2010. Further details are available at www.crsp.ac.uk/projects/disadvantage_and_road_user_safety.htm

Where Does the Money go? Credit and Debt today

The extent and impacts of personal debt in the UK are key policy issues. However, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of the interaction between debt and income – and, specifically, poverty – over time.

Although the association between low income and debt is acknowledged, the link between debt and poverty has not been explored in depth or from a dynamic perspective. This project will provide new insights into how debt is defined and experienced over time by households on low incomes, thereby informing policy aimed at reducing the numbers of over-indebted people and supporting those who experience over-indebtedness and financial crisis. The study will also inform financial inclusion policy through contributing to an understanding of the strategies that are adopted by households in financial difficulties.

The study is timely, given the recent 'credit crunch' and the rising costs of utilities and fuel. As the study adopts a dynamic approach, we will be revisiting families on a regular basis over a period of twelve months and will therefore trace the impacts of the current economic crisis on those already living on low incomes. Further details are available at www.crsp.ac.uk/projects/where_does_the_money_go.htm

Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the New Local Safeguarding Children Boards

CRSP, in partnership with the Centre for Child and Family Research (CCFR), are undertaking an evaluation of the effectiveness of Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) in England.

This will explore the structures and processes adopted by LSCBs to fulfil their core functions. It will also examine whether these new structures and processes have overcome identified weaknesses of Area Child Protection Committees (ACPCs) and promoted inter-agency co-operation. The research is designed to contribute to the development of LSCBs by ensuring learning is fed back to national, regional and local policy-makers and implementers. It will examine effectiveness by assessing practice against an evidence base that already exists in the social sciences about strategic partnership working.

A mixed method approach will be adopted and will include:

- national mapping of LSCBs (web-based survey to identify models of practice and organisational structure);
- interviews with LSCB chairs, strategic partners and practitioners in six case study areas;
- social network analysis in two areas in order to explore in detail how partnerships operate at strategic and operational levels and how procedures are put into practice;
- user involvement which will be explored through interviews with user representatives on LSCBs and representatives of organisations responsible for the protection of users; and
- collection of data on the costs of Board activity, including budget and spending information and details on the level and type of financial contributions made by member organisations to the running of the Board. Time use data from LSCB members will also be sought to capture activity involved in the running of a LSCB.

The issues covered by this study are central to the current government agenda for children's services, underpinned by the Children Act 2004, to ensure an integrated approach to service provision and that children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted.

The project is funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health and is one of the 11 studies forming the 'Safeguarding Children Research Initiative'. Further details of the other projects commissioned under the initiative can be found on: <http://tcrui.ie.ac.uk/scrui/TheInitiative/tabid/95/Default.aspx>

The project commenced in January 2008 and is due to complete in March 2010.

CRSP 25th Anniversary International Conference Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards a More Equal Society?

Thursday 22nd and Friday 23rd January 2009

The Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) is celebrating its 25th Anniversary with a two-day international conference. The event is also part of Loughborough University's Centenary Celebrations.

Over the past decade, in the UK and elsewhere, social inclusion has come to be viewed as the most apposite approach to reducing the burdens of disadvantage, marginalisation and poverty among individuals and communities. Various policy initiatives have been launched under the banner of social inclusion. For the current UK administration, for example, reducing child poverty has become synonymous with including the excluded. But as inequalities continue to widen, such an approach has received growing criticism. It is argued that reducing levels of poverty will not, in itself, achieve genuine social, economic and cultural participation. Inequalities within nations will simply maintain the old divisions while global inequalities may create new threats and barriers to social participation and citizenship.

The need to tackle inequalities is increasingly seen by many within policy and academic circles as requiring urgent action. The CRSP conference: 'Beyond Social Inclusion: Towards a More Equal Society?' will bring together policy makers, practitioners and academics to examine the implications of inequalities for individuals, communities, nation states and international relations. A core emphasis of the conference will be to stimulate dialogue between social scientists and policy makers in order to debate the role policy should play in creating a more equal society.

Confirmed Speakers include:

Wim van Oorschot, Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Tilburg University, The Netherlands.

Stephen Ball, Karl Mannheim Professor of Sociology of Education, Institute of Education, London.

Richard Wilkinson, Professor of Social Epidemiology, University of Nottingham.

Ruth Lister, Professor of Social Policy, Department of Social Sciences, Loughborough University.

John Veit-Wilson, Visiting Professor in Sociology, School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University.

Donald Hirsch, Head of Income Studies, Centre for Research in Social Policy.

Allan Borowski, Professor of Social Work and Social Policy, School of Social Work & Social Policy, La Trobe University, Australia.

Wojciech Woźniak, Department of General Sociology, University of Lodz, Poland.

Further Details

Further information and registration details are available on our website: www.crsp.ac.uk/conference/conference_2009/index.htm

Themed Section in Social Policy and Society

Following our successful conference 'A Fairer Society? A Review of Policies for Vulnerable Groups' in September 2006 we are delighted to announce that a themed section entitled 'The Poverty of Policy? Gaps in Anti-Poverty Policy for Children and Young People', in the latest edition of *Social Policy and Society* (Volume 7, Issue 4), is now available. The themed section has been edited by Dr Line Nyhagen Predelli, Professor Alan France and Research Fellow Chris Dearden.

The section offers a combination of papers from the conference (Bradshaw and Richardson; Smith; Sutton) and papers commissioned specifically to deal with gaps in anti-poverty policy towards children and young people (Lloyd; France; Phung). An overview of some useful sources has also been included (Davis and Sandu).

Further details and abstracts can be found at <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayIssue?jid=SPS&volumeld=7&issueld=04&iid=2177764#>

UK Poverty Expert Joins CRSP

CRSP is delighted to welcome UK poverty expert Donald Hirsch to the Centre. Donald is an independent consultant and writer on social policy. He joined CRSP in October on a part-time basis as the Head of Income Studies and will work with Abigail Davis, Noel Smith and the rest of the Minimum Income Standard team to further develop the project.

Donald states, "I'm excited to be joining CRSP, a first-class research centre located in one of the top-rated social science departments in the country, and with great colleagues. My job there will centre on the development of work on minimum income standards, in which I have already been closely involved and in which CRSP is taking a national and international lead, and on developing the Centre's already strong profile in poverty research, analysis and policy applications."

Please see Donald's website, www.donaldhirsch.com, for further information about his work.