An anti-poverty strategy for the UK

PROGRAMME OUTLINE

Background
Over recent years the UK has had several anti-poverty strategies, primarily for children and (arguably) for pensioners, as well as newer strategies on social mobility and social justice. These have variously covered each nation of the UK and/or the UK as a whole, as well as local authority and city levels.

However, what they have all lacked is an evidence-based link between the policies or actions suggested within the strategy and the outcomes sought. JRF has repeatedly criticised such strategies on these grounds, so we are grasping the nettle by asking what it would take to create an evidenced, all-age strategy to reduce poverty across the UK.

There are a number of assumptions underpinning JRF’s approach.

- Our working definition of poverty is when your resources (especially your material resources) are not sufficient for your needs (especially your material needs). We realise this is contested.

- There is no single best measure of poverty. Measuring income is central but other aspects have their place.

- Poverty is dynamic. For individuals and households over time, the experience can be transient, recurrent, or persistent and this dimension has often been lacking in previous poverty strategies.

- While households are the main unit of measurement, individual experiences matter too, no matter what people’s age or other characteristics. Poverty and the risk of it can affect all age groups and sub-groups of the population.
• Substantially reducing poverty in the UK is possible. We know that there are some policy and practice levers that affect poverty and that attitudes and behaviour are important too but it is not clear how these all interact or what combinations might be most effective.

• It will take considerable financial resources and effort to reduce poverty meaningfully but we know that poverty costs society too. Previous JRF research estimated the cost of current levels of child poverty to be at least £25bn per year – the cost of poverty overall is likely to be much higher. The programme will better quantify the costs on both sides.

• We believe that people of different political backgrounds and perspectives want to understand and reduce poverty, and think there is potential to identify consensus on how we do that.

Underpinning the approach in this proposal is the belief – based on our and others’ evidence – that poverty is affected by a combination of wider structural issues (such as the labour market) and individual agency (such as a decision to search/apply for a job). In other words, there are larger forces at work affecting the options that are available to us and the scale and nature of these structural aspects (from national to sub-national to the very local) is extremely relevant. However, we also know that our own choices still matter and can make a difference – possibly the biggest difference.

The balance between external versus personal causes of poverty is a key political battleground on poverty. It informs popular, political and media debates about the ‘deserving and undeserving poor’. As part of this programme, and in our wider communications activity on poverty, we want to challenge stereotypes and myths. This will always be based on research evidence but our starting point is that poverty is an experience that virtually anyone can go through at some point in their lives. People in poverty deserve to be treated with the same dignity and respect as anyone else.
In one sense, this is a terrible time to be composing a strategy against poverty. Most economic indicators are flat-lining and prospects for future prosperity are dim. Nevertheless, this programme seeks to set out what it would take to seriously reduce poverty at a time when people are looking for answers. Attempting this now will also be an important reminder that a strategy needs to work when the economy is moribund as well as when it is growing. We need to be aware of these dynamics – in terms of economic cycles – in order to provide sustainable solutions.

Programme aim
The main aim of the programme is to produce an evidenced anti-poverty strategy for all age groups and each nation of the UK.

We want our stakeholders and policy-makers to use the outputs we develop to inform national and local anti-poverty strategies. We want to encourage a debate, based on the evidence, among poverty stakeholders about what a low-poverty UK would really be like.

We aim to assess and strengthen the political consensus on how to reduce poverty. While we hope to build as large a consensus as possible from which to launch the strategy, this may entail producing some options that cater for different perspectives on poverty, or suggest a range of ways to alleviate it.

There are a number of questions underlying this process that we will seek to answer. They provide a broad framework for the programme itself:

- What meanings and measures of poverty should be used?
- What does ‘a low-poverty UK’ really mean?
- What kind of economy and society is concomitant with low levels of poverty?
• What are the underlying drivers of poverty?

• What impact do different interventions have on poverty and its drivers?

• How much do these interventions cost and how do they interact?

• What are the barriers to action and how might they be overcome?

**Programme outline**
The basic structure for the programme is centred on a core Task Group of JRF staff and eight paid external advisers. They will be contract-managed by JRF and their explicit role is to be critical and challenging to JRF about this programme and towards each other.

Once set up, a series of consultations, reviews and workshops will gather evidence and ideas for the strategies. At this point, we will take stock and consider whether and how to proceed with further phases of work – potentially including further secondary analysis and modelling before the final phase of pulling the strategies together and testing out ideas in combination. We will be engaging with stakeholders throughout – JRF does not see itself operating in isolation from others on this programme.

**PHASE ONE (2012 to 2013)**

**Core Task Group and external advisers**
There are four overarching clusters of activity in the programme:

1. money;
2. family and community;
3. markets and services;
4. severe poverty.

External advisers will be invited to take responsibility for one or more of these four clusters and JRF Policy & Research staff will lead on `cross-
cutting’ issues (see Figure 1 on page 6). The exact breakdown for areas of responsibility is to be decided with Task Group members.

An important initial job for the Task Group will be agreeing the structure of the proposed work and advisers may have good suggestions for reconfiguring some of the areas. We have appointed on the basis that an adviser has responsibility for each of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as expertise in other areas. Advisers will assist with synthesising the evidence to deliver and write final outputs, as well as in generating policy and practice ideas and testing them out. The Task Group will be responsible for:

- providing expert input on technical aspects of the programme;
- reviewing briefs, proposals and outputs;
- deciding on and contributing to the writing of higher-level outputs from the programme.

The Task Group will be led and chaired by Chris Goulden, Head of the Poverty Team. Other occasional members from JRF will include Gordon Hector (Public Affairs Manager), Emma Stone (Director of Policy & Research) and Abigail Scott Paul (Head of Engagement). Other members of the Policy & Research Poverty Team will also be substantially involved. The group will typically meet every other month.

Extended advice and consensus-building
In addition, we will build overlapping advisory groups or networks of contacts covering the different areas of the programme, so that we can draw on a range of views and expertise as we progress. Each topic is likely to contain long-standing disagreements about its contribution to reducing poverty and tapping into our broad networks will help us to address these. We will need advisers to support us in extending our networks and identifying whom to invite and engage.
To develop an even wider constituency of involvement, we propose to use consensus-building and social media techniques, such as crowdsourcing. We will also carry out a specific exercise to seek to build a collaborative agenda across policy, research and practice.

**Areas for activity**
There are numerous drivers of poverty but we need to cover those we deem to be most important: money; family and community; markets and services; and ‘severe’ poverty. There are also a number of cross-cutting areas. These are summarised in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Areas of investigation**

Reality is of course even more complex than this list implies. There will be interactions and overlaps between these areas, but we also need to make sure we do not miss important aspects. There are complex interactions by geographic area, in terms of markets and services, for example.
The level of existing evidence and policy consensus across these areas varies considerably and knowledge gaps remain. We therefore intend to focus on gathering up what evidence we do have and commissioning more fundamental reviews where we know less.

Please note: JRF also has a parallel programme that is underway on ‘How much does money matter?’. The findings from this will inform our approach to income poverty and measurement across these areas. The two projects in this programme will report mid-2013, with further evidence available based on new analysis of UK cohort survey data in 2014.

Across the areas of the programme, we will carry out a mixture of:
1. a review of international literature about the drivers of poverty in that area (and interactions with other areas). This will include evidence about the costs and impacts/benefits of policy and practice interventions as well as theoretical aspects. 
   These reviews will vary in the resources required, e.g. if we have recently done a similar review or if we know that the evidence base is light;
2. the generation and assessment of feasible and impactful policy and practice options and future scenarios.
   This may be done through the review process itself or through convening discussions among the Task Group and other experts to generate new ideas (or advice on which existing policies are working to reduce poverty);
3. new secondary analysis to look at relationships between that area with poverty;
4. econometric and other modelling to assess the impact of interventions on future levels of poverty (however measured).

Annex 2 lists the proposed timetable for the reviews according to the level of budget (high £40k, medium £20k and low £10k). Judgements about the resources needed vary from where we have already done a recent review (e.g. ethnicity) to where we know there is considerable
evidence that has not yet been brought together (e.g. gender). Recommendations are also based on some review areas being larger (e.g. employment and pay) or smaller in scope (e.g. childcare).

Decisions about necessary further analyses will be based on whether there are likely to be gaps in evidence (e.g. disability) or if extra modelling will be crucial to the production of a strategy (e.g. benefit take-up rates). A lot of these decisions depend on what is found in the reviews and the advice of the Task Group, so some future flexibility is assumed.

**Research and policy reviews**
There are 7 high-, 14 medium- and 10 low-resource reviews. These are subject to change on the advice of the Task Group and other partners.

- **High-resource reviews are**: personal relationships; employment and pay; institutional care; disability, mental health, impairment and long-term conditions; gender; area regeneration and localisation; historical and international anti-poverty strategies.
- **Medium-resource reviews are**: take-up of benefits; means-testing versus universalism; family structure; community and neighbourhoods; adult and tertiary education; advice and support; transport; fuel and other essential goods and services; problem drug and alcohol use; homelessness; migrants; crime and the informal economy; non-income measures of poverty; devolution.
- **Low-resource reviews are**: savings, wealth and assets; credit and debt; pre-school education; primary and secondary education; health and social care; childcare; refugees and asylum-seekers; demography; sexual orientation; religion.

We do not expect full syntheses of evidence to be carried out or full reports to be written up for JRF publication (just summaries). The point of the reviews is to identify and quality-control the evidence in each area before submitting it in a common format for use in developing an anti-poverty strategy (or several) and for use by different stakeholders.
We aim to store and publish the results from the reviews in an online database. This will be an important tool for the policy and practice community across the UK in its own right.

Commissioning of the reviews will be phased over 2012/2013, with larger reviews done first. The proposed commissioning schedule is at Annex 2. The content and the schedule will be confirmed with the Task Group.

**Theoretical reviews**
In addition to reviews across these areas, we will critically examine relevant theories and areas of contention in:

- **Economics**: There are pertinent issues here around the functioning of markets, job creation, job demand, financial (including work) incentives and economic growth. There is ongoing debate in these areas but it has not yet been captured for use in poverty reduction strategies.

- **Sociology**: Structure and agency are two key concepts in sociological thinking around poverty. It will be useful to review these conceptual aspects and to explore thinking around measures and meanings of poverty, going beyond simply income.

**Policy workshops**
We will carry out two streams of workshops to generate policy and practice ideas around (a) tax and benefits and (b) welfare and Universal Credit. These will build on current and recent work that JRF has funded, such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies’ projections of poverty, the 2008 report on benefit uprating and the review of implementation issues for Universal Credit. These will take place in the second half of 2013.

**Visions for a low-poverty United Kingdom**
To develop a strategy, we need better visions for what a UK without high levels of poverty would look like. Beyond basic outcome indicators (such as reducing relative income poverty for children to 10 per cent by 2020), existing strategies do not contain an inspiring goal to aim towards. We
intend to pull together visions for a low-poverty UK from across the political spectrum.

This will serve two purposes. First, it will allow us to identify the core of a strategy that is accepted by as wide a political constituency as possible. Not all the decisions about a strategy will be evidence-based – some will need to reflect a value base. Locating areas of potential consensus will help us craft a strategy that is useful to the widest possible political spectrum.

Second, it will support the wider credibility of the programme. The strategy needs to engage with different political viewpoints – and its impact will be reduced if it is seen to be simply repeating the received wisdom of any given ideology. Actively exploring different political visions of what a low-poverty UK would look like helps prevent that reputation forming.

Pulling together these political visions will be a project led by the JRF Public Affairs Manager. The aim is to procure short papers covering the vision of the main ideological groupings of UK politics, from contributors associated with all main political parties:

- Conservative and centre-right visions of a low-poverty UK;
- centre-left, socialist and labour visions of a low-poverty UK;
- Liberal and libertarian visions of a low-poverty UK;
- visions of low poverty in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

**PHASE TWO (2014 to 2016)**

*Secondary analysis and modelling*

In the final quarter of 2013, we will take stock and review progress made so far, also taking into account changes in the external environment. At this point we will consider whether and how to proceed with future phases.
Our current thinking is that further analysis may be required in many areas. This will either be (a) secondary analysis of existing national (UK-wide and within UK) survey datasets or (b) incorporation into modelling the impacts on poverty of policies or outcomes in the area in question. These can generally be clustered into top-level headings (on the basis that survey data sources are similar):

1. money (welfare, tax and benefits);
2. family and community;
3. education;
4. health and social care (separately from education);
5. markets and costs (housing, employment, childcare, social care, transport, fuel and other essential goods and services);
6. ‘severe’ poverty.

Cross-cutting issues are less uniform, so additional analyses are budgeted for on:

7. non-income measures (including well-being, for example);
8. equality/diversity (together, to consider intersectionality).

Each would include ‘devolution and localisation’ (i.e. showing data for the four different nations and locally as far as possible), as well as incorporating dynamic data, where available (i.e. cohort surveys).

**Bringing it all together**

By far the most challenging task is to bring together all this evidence and visions for a low-poverty UK. The Task Group will need to have an intensive period of sifting through and agreeing what should be included in strategies and what the balance of policies ought to be. There will need to be a ‘test and adapt’ phase to look at the overall impacts and interactions of policies and judgements made about resources and timings. This will need to rely on debate, consensus and additional econometric modelling.
Costs and benefits
Alongside the modelling, we will need information about the costs of policies and potential beneficial impacts on national accounts. We will also seek to revisit the work JRF carried out on the costs of poverty to society (in our child poverty programme). We will update that work, using the evidence gathered in this programme.

Communications and influencing
To deliver the programme’s major influencing goals, we will start working up a detailed communications strategy early in the programme. The focus of this is likely to be:

- to establish contact with relevant stakeholders;
- to maintain engagement and create dialogue with stakeholders throughout the lifetime of the project (offline and online);
- to maintain the profile of JRF and the work it is doing to reduce poverty;
- to counter negative perceptions of people living in poverty;
- to position JRF as a place to come to get the facts on UK poverty.

Governance arrangements
There will be a Programme Advisory Group to provide advice and governance for the whole programme, chaired by Tony Stoller, Chair of JRF and JRHT, and attended by Julia Unwin, Chief Executive. There will be a core Task Group made up of JRF staff and eight external advisers, chaired by Chris Goulden.

Each cluster (money, family and community, markets and services and severe poverty) will have at least one Task Group lead and a small advisory group/network attached to it, to facilitate peer review of outputs and ensure we capture different perspectives within that broad area. A
Task Group member will have responsibility for each of the devolved nations.

Finally, Chris Goulden will report into an internal group chaired by Julia Unwin, which brings together the different strands of JRF’s anti-poverty work (of which this programme is one strand). This includes our work on JRHT as an anti-poverty landlord, JRF as an anti-poverty employer, and our anti-poverty Communications work.

**Equality and diversity**

Equality and diversity are central to this programme. A fundamental principle of any strategy to reduce poverty has to be the lowering of high average rates of poverty and deprivation currently experienced by certain groups, in particular:

- lone parents;

- some ethnic minority groups, especially Pakistani and Bangladeshi;

- disabled people.

Our current evidence on equality and poverty is stronger in some areas than others. For instance, we have an ongoing programme on poverty and ethnicity and we have looked in depth at child poverty in the past. We have conducted several reviews of research on poverty and ethnicity already, concluding that work status and employment rates are key drivers. These aspects are being explored further in two large-scale projects about employer workplace practices and local labour markets (both reporting Spring 2013), and further research has been commissioned this year on caring/earning and social networks. There are also considerable gaps, particularly around gender, sexual orientation, religion and disability. While JRF has put major resources into exploring issues for disabled people in the past, these have not always had ‘poverty’ as their focus.
This programme will make important contributions to understanding the links between poverty and different aspects of equality in its own right.

**Involving people with direct experience**
We are committed to speaking about the issues that matter to people experiencing poverty in the UK. As part of this programme, we will partner with organisations with expertise in user-involvement to (a) reality-check our strategies against the experiences of people in poverty and (b) provide support for people in poverty to speak on behalf of wider issues.

The exact nature of involvement will be agreed in association with organisations and participants. We would agree with all those involved how best to liaise between participatory input and the Task Group and other advisory processes, especially the Programme Advisory Group.

**Programme timetable**
The programme will run from September 2012 to June 2016 (See Annex 1). There will be a formal breakpoint in December 2013 to allow JRF Trustees to assess progress and consider the direction of the second half of the programme.

**Impact assessment**
We will carry out ongoing, internal monitoring of impacts and re-examine this in the longer term, three years after the end of this programme (from the end of 2018). We will develop measurable objectives for the programme through internal seminars and activity as well as from monitoring our activity, drawing on programme advisory networks as appropriate.
# Annex 1: Timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Steering Group/advisers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews Phase 1 (high)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviews Phase 2 (med/low)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary analyses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical reviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political visions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy workshops</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario modelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macro costs/benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs of poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other national strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Annex 2: Review schedule

High resource reviews part 1:
1. Personal relationships
2. Area regeneration and localism
3. International and historical anti-poverty strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call goes out</td>
<td>28 November 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call closes</td>
<td>6 February 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project starts</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project ends</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

High resource reviews part 2:
1. Employment and pay
2. Institutional care
3. Disability, mental health, impairment and long-term conditions
4. Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call goes out</td>
<td>5 December 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call closes</td>
<td>13 February 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project starts</td>
<td>March 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project ends</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Medium resource reviews:
1. Take up of benefits
2. Means-testing versus universalism
3. Family structure
4. Community and neighbourhoods
5. Adult and tertiary education
6. Advice and support
7. Transport
8. Fuel and other essential goods and services
9. Devolution
10. Problem drug and alcohol abuse
11. Homelessness
12. Migrants
13. Crime and the informal economy
14. Non-income measures of poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call goes out</td>
<td>September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call closes</td>
<td>October 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project starts</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project ends</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Low resource reviews:**
1. Savings, wealth and assets
2. Credit and debt
3. Pre-school education
4. Primary and secondary education
5. Health and social care
6. Childcare
7. Refugees and asylum-seekers
8. Demography
9. Sexual orientation
10. Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call goes out</td>
<td>October 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Call closes</td>
<td>November 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project starts</td>
<td>December 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project ends</td>
<td>March 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB. The timing of calls going up on the JRF website for the medium and low resource reviews will be phased over September and October 2013 respectively.