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The Case for Universal Basic Services

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Abstract

This paper shifts the focus from transfers to public services. It mounts a case for Universal Basic Services (UBS): a proposal to safeguard and develop existing public services and to extend this model of provision into new areas. The first part argues that public services require a distinct conceptual justification and sets this out in terms of shared human needs and a foundational economy. The second part develops the normative arguments for UBS, in terms of efficiency, equality, solidarity and sustainability. The third part considers some of the issues to be faced in delivering UBS and the role of state institutions, with brief illustrations of adult social care and bus transport service provisions. The final section summarises some developments, including experience of Covid-19, which might enhance the political impetus for UBS.

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Introduction

In his original Report, Beveridge largely focused on how money transfers and social insurance could alleviate poverty, addressing the first 'giant' of Want. The success of this system, however, was premised on the provision of a wide range of services in kind that would directly tackle Beveridge's four other giants: a National Health Service (Disease), public education (Ignorance), public housing (Squalor), and a range of employment policies (Idleness). Beveridge assumed that social transfers could only be effective if situated on a strong foundation of public services in kind.

This paper focuses on these latter issues. It develops the case for Universal Basic Services (UBS), a system which safeguards and develops existing public services while also extending such a model of provision into new areas. The

idea of UBS was originally developed by the Institute for Global Prosperity in 2017 [1], who proposed a widening of free public services to enable every citizen to live a more fulfilled life and to ensure greater access to more sustainable levels of security, opportunity and participation. The term 'UBS' was chosen to enable comparison with Universal Basic Income (UBI), a system of universal cash payments made without the conditions found in contemporary social protection systems. UBI has been much discussed recently and has gained considerable support, despite trenchant criticism.

The original UBS proposal advocated an extension of public services to address, as a minimum, Shelter, Nutrition, Transport, and Information, alongside traditionally provided services such as Health and Education. Recently, this original model has been extensively developed and applied by Anna Coote and Andrew Percy [2], on which this article draws.

A core distinction between UBI and UBS concerns fungibility. The fungibility of money means that government money transfers permit people to spend income on whatever they want. Public services are not fungible but deliver specific activities or provisions. As such, UBS is vulnerable to the critique that it fails to respect consumer sovereignty and market democracy. Thus, UBS requires a distinct conceptual and moral justification, which I have developed elsewhere, and summarise in Part 1 [3]. Part 2 then sets out the case for collective responsibility and public provision in terms of efficiency, equality, solidarity and sustainability. In Part 3 I consider some of the issues in delivering UBS, with brief illustrative examples of potential adult social care and bus transport services. The final section concludes.

The essence of my argument here is to develop an alternative theory of value, counterposing common human needs against the single-minded pursuit of individual wants.

Part 1: A conceptual and moral framework for UBS

There are two core elements to the conceptual justification of UBS. First, a theory of our common humanity, with needs that we all share, and which we all need satisfied in order to live a flourishing life. Second, the idea that the 'foundational economy' is an important concept for meeting these needs.

Shared needs

Conventional economic theory centres around the wants individuals happen to have, whether these are assumed to derive from an individual's innate preferences or from their cultural and economic environment, Conventional social policy has challenged this argument on various grounds, including the existence of common human needs, but without challenging some of its premises. The essence of my argument here (and elsewhere) is to develop an alternative theory of value, counterposing common human needs against the single-minded pursuit of individual wants. This requires us to turn to two other schools of thought – the capability approach and need theory.

The capability approach, first elaborated by Amartya Sen [4], conceives of human wellbeing in terms of the range of substantive freedoms and opportunities that people possess. These 'capabilities' in turn rest on the 'functionings' of people; 'an achievement of a person: what she or he manages to do or to be', such as doing a particular job or being well-nourished. Capability is ultimately, therefore, the extent to which people are free to choose to live one type of life or another.

Unlike Sen, Martha Nussbaum lists ten 'human functional capabilities' that exist across all cultures: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; other species; play; and control over one's environment. Of these, she argues that there are three 'core' capabilities- those of affiliation, bodily integrity and practical reason. But to justify this prioritisation she later relies on the language of common needs [5].
Human need theory has been advanced from a variety of perspectives. Philosophers, economists, psychologists, sociologists, and theologians, to name but a few, have contributed to debates on the nature of human needs, how to measure them and how to enhance their satisfaction. Given this diverse array of voices, it is hardly surprising that there is much debate as to what humans truly need [6, 7]. This does not mean, however, that common elements cannot be found. Within every account of needs, its advocates purport to provide a reasoned, objective and disaggregated conception of human well-being. Most accounts reject the notion that well-being can be reduced to any unitary measure (such as money). Instead, these approaches often involve formulating more substantive lists of components, all of which have merit in and of themselves. Such approaches are objective in that they use collective reasoning to understand wellbeing. Emotions can be included in the list, but the focus is on functionings, not feelings. The idea of common needs is recognised in the UN's 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, which acknowledges that such needs are foundational for just and sustainable development.

A central feature of many accounts, including my own, is universality. The universality of need rests upon the belief that if certain 'basic' needs are not satisfied then serious harm of some objective kind will result. In A Theory of Human Need [8], Len Doyal and I argue that all individuals, everywhere, both in the present and the future, have the basic needs of participation, health and autonomy. These must be met in order for people to avoid harm, to participate in society and to reflect critically upon the conditions in which they find themselves. Such needs are a universal precondition for a meaningful life within society. Beyond these basic needs, universality also applies to certain 'intermediate needs', including material and non-material elements. Water, nutrition, shelter, education, and healthcare form part of the former, while care, significant primary relationships, and physical and economic security form part of the latter.

The capability approach and human need theory have two other characteristics. First, functionings and needs are plural and non-substitutable: they cannot be added up and summarised in a single unit of account. One element of need-satisfaction cannot be traded off against another - more education is of no immediate help to someone who is in need of more food. Second, central functionings and needs, unlike wants and preferences, are in theory satiable. As people's intermediate needs are addressed, the amount needed to achieve a sustainable level of participation, health, and autonomy diminishes, eventually reaching a plateau. The distributive principle at the base of human need theory is sufficiency: to bring all individuals up to a decent threshold (though this can be defined in different ways).

But while basic and intermediate needs may be considered universal, need satisfiers - the particular goods, services, activities and relationships required to meet specific needs in any given social setting - almost always vary across different historical, geographical and social contexts. This leads to a philosophical and methodological dilemma: how in a democracy can these satisfiers be collectively identified? Need and capability approaches dispute the logical and moral priority accorded to peoples' wants and preferences in orthodox, market-led economies. A collective alternative is counterposed to individualism. However, this then creates the danger of some groups, such as officials, academics or politicians, asserting that they have the competence and authority to decide what others need.

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The solution to this, in brief, is to mobilise citizen engagement to determine specific populations' need satisfiers, informed by relevant scientific findings and professional expertise. This dual process would need to combine the externally verified stock of relevant knowledge, such as nutrition and epidemiology, with the experientially grounded understanding of people in their everyday lives in specific contexts. To resolve inevitable disputes and disagreements, forums would be required that are as open, democratic, and free from vested interests as possible.

The procedural complexity of balancing inclusivity with expertise should not discourage us from seeking to reach this goal. Humans frequently arbitrate complex decisions in large groups, as evidenced by Elinor Ostrom's research on the communal management of resources [9]. Recently, citizens' assemblies have shown how communal decision-making can take place. A sample of lay members, selected to represent as broad a cross-section of the population as possible, consider an issue, aided by experts, and draw up conclusions based on consensus. The Irish Assembly from 2016–2018 resulted in a referendum that legalised abortion, while the Citizens' Convention on Climate in France has agreed a detailed, 149 point plan to reduce French carbon emissions by at least 40% by the end of this decade.

The foundational economy

Goods and services to satisfy needs must be produced, distributed and utilised. While recognising the critical contribution of private markets in this process, the case for UBS entails a different model of the economy. Given the presence of non-substitutable need satisfiers, such as food and education in the example above, the economy should be viewed as a network of 'systems of provision,' where, depending on the sector, the links between production and consumption are structured in distinct ways [10]. The food system differs from the energy system, the housing system from the education system, and so on. Each provisioning system comprises physical elements (infrastructure, technology, land use, supply chains) and social elements (social institutions such as markets and states, social relationships, and social norms and cultures). Each displays a different structure and dynamic.

This understanding of the modern economy has been extended and deepened in the idea of the 'foundational economy' developed by the Manchester School over the last decade [11]. The material foundational economy directly delivers a range of essential need satisfiers in contemporary market economies. Its main components are: pipe and cable utilities, including telecommunications; transport infrastructure and services for private and public means of transport; food production, processing, and distribution; and retail banking services and payments systems. Alongside this is the providential foundational economy, which is essentially the entire welfare state: health care, education, social care, police and emergency services, and public administration. Across both of these domains sits housing. The entire foundational economy accounts for about 50% of both total employment and GDP in the UK and across Europe [11].

The providential foundational economy, which is essentially the entire welfare state.

These services are all 'mundane,' in that they are taken for granted until they fail. They differ from other sectors of the economy in several ways: the benefits, though sometimes mediated through individual commodity purchases, are ultimately reliant on infrastructure, networks and branches; they are relatively sheltered from international competition; and they are generated through collective endeavour for mutual benefit in the public interest.

Synthesis

There is clearly a parallel between the frameworks of human needs and provisioning systems. Both recognise the irreducible heterogeneity of consumption, the multi-faceted nature of human needs, and the variety of systems on which we all depend. Both recognise the importance of shared systems and mutual benefits. And potentially, they can both

justify the idea of local economies under more local control. Combined, they provide the conceptual foundations for UBS.

Table 1 provides a provisional map of the links between universal basic needs, contemporary clusters of need satisfiers, and modern provisioning systems. The second column provides a list of contemporary need satisfiers, and so lists potential components of UBS. It is clear that these basic provisioning systems are presently distributed across both the private and public sectors in a shifting pattern. This varied distribution raises the questions of what justifies the public sector, and where its boundaries should lie.

Table 1

Linking needs and provisioning systems: The potential components of UBS.

Universal needs	Contemporary need satisfiers	Provisioning systems: the foundational economy
Nutrition	Adequate nutritious diets; food security	Agriculture, food processing and food retailing systems: 'from field to fork'
Shelter	Adequate, secure, affordable housing	Housing: land, building, owning, letting
	Energy	Utilities
	Water and sanitation	Utilities
Social participation: Education/ Information/ communication	Schooling and adult education	Education and training systems
	Phone, computer and internet connection	Telecommunications
	Access to effective and healthy means of transport	Road, rail etc. infrastructure Public transport services
Health: prevention, cure, care	Public health Medical services Social care	Public health services National health services Social care services
Physical security	Emergency services	Emergency services
Income security	Employment	Decent, secure jobs
	Income maintenance	Social security; private insurance
	Money/payment systems	Retail banking

Note: The middle column denotes contemporary need satisfiers - the potential components of UBS.

Source: Gough 2019.

Part 2: The normative case for UBS

Collective responsibilities and social entitlements

The essential argument for public provision of some kind is that the combined efforts of markets and charity cannot guarantee all people's needs being met. Only public authority can guarantee the equitable satisfaction of need. Since World War II, the idea of universal needs has been used to ground appeals to social rights: moral or legal claims possessed by 'right-bearers' that corresponding 'duty-bearers' must take seriously. It is usual to divide these rights into two categories, distinguishing 'negative' civil and political rights from 'positive' socio-economic rights. The former entail a duty of forbearance and protection, for example, rights to freedom of expression and against discrimination. The latter entail a duty of assistance and provision, for example, rights to education or healthcare [12]. T.H. Marshall's writings on social citizenship provide the classic argument for extending rights to include positive social rights. The economic historian R.H. Tawney observed that 'the standard of living of the great mass of the nation depends, not merely on the remuneration which they are paid for their labour, but on the social income which they receive as citizens.' [13]

The idea of social rights often provides the moral underpinning for welfare states' collective obligation to meet the basic needs of their citizens. Inherent within them is the sense of social obligation to all, including the 'needs of strangers,' although the more distant the connection to the state, the more attenuated the sense of obligation tends to become. At present, this obligation ends at national borders, while even within a nation's borders, a distinction is usually drawn between the entitlements of those who are citizens and those who are 'mere' residents. As globalisation leads to ever greater flows of refugees and economic migrants, the answer to the question of who is a 'stranger' is constantly evolving, with some arguing that we should reimagine social citizenship, with rights being dependent on residency rather than passports.

The argument thus far is that there exist a number of intrinsic, non-substitutable needs that have a high moral claim to satisfaction and that there should be a collective responsibility to guarantee entitlements to their satisfaction. But how should these services be delivered and financed? The case for collective provision to meet needs can be made on four main grounds: equity, efficiency, solidarity, and sustainability.

Equity and the 'social wage'

The value of free and accessible public services to the individual recipient is frequently called the 'social wage,' as it replaces costs that the individual would otherwise have to pay for directly. In the absence of public provision, the cost of purchasing such services can be exorbitant, and as we descend the income scale, ever greater proportions of income will be required just to fulfil basic needs.

This is a major argument for free public provision of necessities financed from taxation. Even if the total tax system of a country is broadly proportional to income, as it is in the UK, the overall result will still be progressive, i.e. the relative size of net income plus services will increase as we descend the income scale. Table 2 shows that, on average in OECD countries, existing public services are worth the equivalent of a huge 76 percent of the post-tax income of the poorest quintile compared with just 14 per cent of the richest. Public services also reduce income inequality in OECD countries by an average of 20 per cent [14]. Free provision of necessities automatically benefits

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lower income households, without the disincentivising effects that could result from money transfers. Allocation according to need and citizenship, not market demand, automatically serves redistributive social goals.

Table 2

In-kind benefits as a share of disposable income by quintile, average over 27 OECD countries, late 2000s.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Total
Education	30.6%	18.5%	14.2%	10.4%	5.6%	11.8%
Health care	34.9%	22.2%	15.8%	11.8%	7.2%	13.9%
Social housing	1.8%	0.7%	0.4%	0.2%	0.1%	0.4%
ECEC	4.5%	3.0%	2.4%	1.5%	0.8%	1.8%
Elderly care	4.0%	1.9%	0.7%	0.4%	0.2%	0.9%
Total	75.8%	46.4%	33.5%	24.3%	13.7%	28.8%

Source: Verbist et al. 2012.

Efficiency

Within much of economic theory, the prevailing - and sometimes justified - assumption is that markets enhance productive efficiency. In turn, it is often assumed that public services will necessarily be inefficient as they are not exposed to competition and are often defended by vested interests. It is as a consequence of this philosophy that public services have been progressively exposed to market forces from the 1980s onwards. But while markets may enhance the delivery of some goods and services, they are not a panacea, and the failures of unregulated economic markets are well known. In particular, their tendencies to monopoly, their inability to supply public goods, the self-defeating production of positional goods, and the inefficiency or harms they cause as a result of meeting needs in commodified forms.

Within competitive markets, transaction costs are often higher for both consumers and providers, including the search costs for customers of comparing different pension or utility providers, the administrative costs of drawing up appropriate contracts, the policing and enforcement costs of monitoring large private companies such as Serco and G4S. Moreover, several sectors of the material foundational economy, notably the networked sectors, have large economies of scale, meaning they are 'natural monopolies.' When these monopolies are unregulated private companies, this can result in socially harmful pricing, given the absence of competitive forces that would normally drive prices downwards. This may render universally needed services unaffordable for many. When these issues are additionally affected by an unequal knowledge of the choices available, people could become substantially worse off from uninformed

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consumption decisions, or could fail to access or be offered the services they need. Market forces have been unable to remedy this, with competition between multiple providers, widening of customer choice, and conventional cost-efficiency criteria for measuring success largely failing to improve outputs, let alone outcomes [15]. Thus, there is a significant efficiency case for publicly provided universal basic services.

Solidarity

Recognising that we have shared needs and collective responsibilities is embodied in the idea of solidarity. Here I take solidarity to mean feelings of sympathy and responsibility between people that promote mutual support. It is an inclusive process, not just within well-acquainted groups but also, crucially, between people who are 'strangers' to each other. The nature of UBS gives it the potential to develop this sense of solidarity within the community at large. It involves collective action towards shared objectives [16]. There is a growing literature on the ways in which neoliberal capitalism, based on individualism, choice and competition, weakens the values of social citizenship and undermines solidarity [17].

UBS calls for collective policy and practice: sharing resources and acting together to manage risks and problems that people cannot effectively respond to alone. This is reflected, for example, in the EU's long-standing goal of economic and social 'cohesion': combining a free market economy with 'a commitment to the values of internal solidarity and mutual support which ensures open access for all members of society to services of general benefit and protection [18].' Some have argued that public services 'crowd out' social capital. Their argument is that provision of services by the government takes the onus of caring for community members away from the public, thus inhibiting informal caring networks, mutual trust and social norms that favour civil commitment and trustworthiness. However, there is much evidence that contradicts this hypothesis, including the fact that Nordic-style welfare regimes, where there are more universal services, tend to have higher levels of bonding and social capital [19].

Sustainability

Public services have a greater potential to pursue sustainability goals than transfer systems, where both the service offering and uptake will be market driven. In particular, public services have a greater potential role to play in the prevention of harms emerging, rather than curing, caring and compensating for existing harms. There is a strong case that preventing harms is better for human wellbeing than mitigating their consequences, as well as being more financially efficient. Yet despite repetition of these arguments, it is remarkable how marginal and shallow is the commitment to prevention across existing public services, in the UK or elsewhere. I have attempted to explain this elsewhere in terms of the dominant ideas and interests driving public service provision, especially since the 1970s [20].

This disengagement is most apparent in the responses to the most profound, indeed existential, threat to contemporary public policy - climate collapse and extreme environmental stress. Yet the urgent need to move away from unsustainable economic, social and environmental practices provides at least two novel justifications for extending universal public services [21]. First, public provision of services strengthens the capacity of communities to adapt to or cope with severe climatic and environmental stress. The impact of Hurricane Katrina on the predominantly poor and black populations of Louisiana (where more than 1,500 died), in contrast to its impact in Cuba (where only two died) demonstrated the importance of strong collective services [2].

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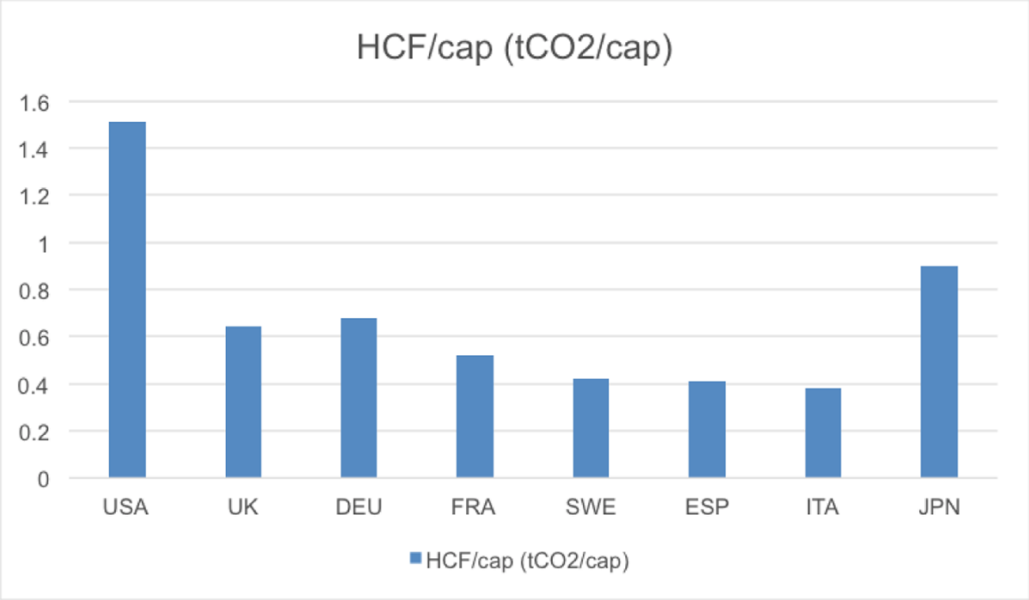
Second, public services can play a vital role in decarbonising the economy in a just way. For example, Green New Deal programmes to retrofit the vast bulk of the housing stock will require public planning, finance and management. These will be needed to ensure a 'just transition' to lower carbon living, not simply a green capitalist transition that will load costs onto the poorest people and communities. Public provisioning systems for healthcare and education are better able than market systems to promote sustainable consumption, to implement national strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and to coordinate sustainable practices such as active travel and local food procurement. There is evidence

Figure 1. Health carbon footprints per capita, 2014.



Source: Pichler et al. 2019.

that public provisioning systems for healthcare are more ecologically sustainable than market systems. Figure 1 shows that the annual per capita carbon footprint of health care in the USA is more than double that in the UK and three and half times greater than in several European countries [22].

Part 3: Delivering UBS

UBS is inherently a disaggregated and context-specific strategy. Table 1 illustrates the diversity of need satisfiers and systems of provision. It includes: pure public goods (such as emergency services), pure private goods (such as many food purchases), both capital and current goods, networks with large economies of scale, and more. UBS is a policy framework for thinking about a very diverse range of provisions. (In this respect it is qualitatively different from Universal Basic Income). Given the necessity of this diversity, can any general guidelines be agreed to achieve a coherent public system of universal services?

The complexity of such a system is effectively illustrated by Coote and Percy, who highlight issues that include responsibility, power and devolution, ownership, funding arrangements, degree of participation, conditionality and entitlements [2]. Despite this complexity, they conclude with a list of common features that can unify a UBS strategy:

- Collective responsibility for meeting shared needs will be exercised through democratically elected governments.
- Power will be devolved to the lowest appropriate level (according to the principle of subsidiarity).
- Services will be delivered by a range of organisations with different models of ownership and control, all sharing a clear set of enforceable public interest obligations.
- Services will be accessible and affordable for all according to need, not ability to pay.
- There will be meaningful participation in planning and delivering services by residents and service users, working in close partnership with professionals and other front-line workers.
- There will be clear rules and procedures for fair and inclusive eligibility and entitlement.

Coote and Percy are clear that the guarantee of entitlements need not entail direct provision of services by state agencies. But the state – central, regional and local – will play a pivotal role in three respects.

The first is to guarantee the entitlements of citizens/residents to basic services and to ensure equality of access. The codification of rights and entitlements will differ across services and between countries, for example through constitutional law, other justiciable law, regulatory bodies, professional ethics, and other processes.

The second is to raise taxes or borrow money and distribute resources. Much of the focus will be on current expenditure, but capital and infrastructure spending will gain new importance. The independent Infrastructure Strategy Commission has called for Universal Basic Infrastructure: 'Everywhere in the UK should be served by high quality hard infrastructure and have access to high quality human capital-building universal services.' [23] In distributing resources, a social conception of value and associated measures will emerge, such as the concept of 'social return on investment' (SROI) that has been developed over the last decade. This concept was adopted by the British government in the Social Value Act 2012, which instructs public service commissioners to consider how to 'improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the relevant area.' Such ambitions sit uneasily within a market-based system, with social goals possibly directly opposing goals of cost efficiency. If staff delivering meals to people who are housebound take time to sit and chat with beneficiaries, this may reduce their sense of social isolation and generally improve their wellbeing, but it will increase costs by taking up more staff time.

The third essential function of states is regulation and standard setting. The benefits and risks of the 'regulatory state' are well understood. According to Grubb [24], public regulation and standard-setting, as applied, for instance, to vehicles, buildings, and electrical appliances, is the unsung success story of decarbonisation policy across many nations. All UBS proposals necessarily incorporate proposals for regulation in the interests of citizens' wellbeing. One solution proposed by the Manchester School is to extend 'social licensing' powers and functions to local authorities to regulate and integrate privately-provided essential services. 'If firms are providing welfare–critical foundational services, like retail banking or adult care, they should be treated as in the public domain regardless of ownership.'

As examples of the sort of policy mixes required to implement UBS, I consider very briefly just two service domains: adult social care and bus services.

Adult social care

An entitlement to adequate, good quality, free or affordable social care should be a national priority, especially in the aftermath of Covid-19. Yet needs for care are almost infinitely varied and evolving. An Alzheimer's patient has vastly different support needs to someone who recently lost the ability to walk and is experiencing depression. The level of family support people have is also hugely variable at this stage of life and interacts with their support needs. How can

common entitlements to care be guaranteed in such a necessarily non-standardised arena? Can we reconcile in practice the desired universality of service provision with the flexibility needed for these types of services? To safeguard a mixed model of welfare, considerable regulation and standard setting would be needed, at both national and local levels.

There is not the space to discuss this here, but learning from best practice in similar countries can provide one way forward. For example, the German long-term care insurance (LTCI) scheme features universal social rights within a strong cost-containment framework. An alternative model is found in Scotland, where free personal care is provided for over-65s and free nursing care is offered at any age, if you are assessed and found to need it by the local authority. The extra costs in applying the Scottish system to England would be around £3.8-4.2bn, some 2% of GDP. A comprehensive national care system, according to the King's Fund, would cost c£6 bn per annum, or 3% of GDP, after deducting existing transfers and taking into account reductions in costly hospital referrals [2].

Bus travel

A second example is to provide a universal entitlement to free bus travel, in effect extending the current Freedom Pass for over-60s to the entire population. It would benefit basic needs for equitable participation in society, for access to employment and services, and for health and wellbeing. Its distributive impact would be progressive [1].

Adaptations to the current service (beyond cost) would be required. First, free bus travel is of no benefit if there are no suitable and convenient bus routes. Substantial prior investment in new buses and routes would be needed. Second, integrated regulations, such as that provided by Transport for London, should be extended across the nation. The costs of extreme deregulation outside London include: fares increasing faster than other items of consumer expenditure, declining passenger journeys in all areas including metropolitan areas (unlike London), poor interconnections and lack of inter-ticketing, a halving of spending on subsidies for social necessary services, and the unintended consequence of 'forced car ownership.' Lessons can again be learned from other European countries [25]. The cost of introducing free bus travel in the UK is estimated to be c 0.26% GDP plus 0.63% GDP for capital investment; a total of c0.9% GDP.

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Conclusion

The case for Universal Basic Services made here is an essential part of the renewal of social citizenship: a shift in perspective from customers and consumers to residents and citizens. To achieve this will require a resolute confrontation with the underlying theory and morality of the current economic model. The theoretical justification for UBS is the existence of core human needs - multi-dimensional and non-substitutable - that require collective responsibilities and a renewed foundational economy to fulfill. The normative justification is the superior potential of UBS to secure human flourishing via greater equality, efficiency, collective solidarity and long-term sustainability. The political argument is that the implementation of Universal Basic Services can achieve results that are superior to relying solely on cash payments (including a hypothetical UBI scheme) alongside markets for commodified services. UBS constitutes an incremental but radical shift in social policy, yet one that is considerably cheaper than a non-trivial universal basic income. Above all, UBS is more capable of integrating social and ecological goals for a just and urgent eco-social transition to a safe planet.

Achieving UBS will mean reversing several trends over the past four decades. From 1980 onwards the welfare system has been broken up in three main ways: non-state providers have been encouraged (both for-profit and not-for-profit),

non-state sources of funds have been expanded, and decisions about what, how much and how to provide have been devolved to intermediate organisations or final consumers [26, 27]. Simultaneously, much of the foundational economy, like energy, water, telecommunications and public transport, has been extensively privatised and outsourced. A new business model has emerged, which has undermined what was left of the social contract in the foundational economy. As a part of this, short-term profit maximizing corporates have migrated to the welfare sector, with firms like Serco, A4E and Atos playing leading roles in supplying care homes and taking the place of public or non-profit providers. In advocating for and extending UBS, there must be a reevaluation of the current welfare state and the foundational economy.

Much of this needs to be reversed to develop a strategy for universal basic services, but that does not require a return to a 'pure public' model. Entitlements to UBS can be guaranteed, even in more private or mixed settings, using a range of interventions including regulation, standard setting and monitoring, taxation and subsidies. But the unifying proposal is to advocate directly collective solutions, as opposed to providing income support and leaving provisioning to market forces.

It is possible that the Covid-19 pandemic, the resulting lockdowns and other extraordinary policy shifts in 2020 will help foster a new social model. The UK government, along with many others, has recognised the contributions of 'essential workers.' I have demonstrated that its list of essential workers overlaps almost exactly with the sectors shown in Table 1 [28]. It extends far beyond health and care or emergency services to include farmers, supermarket staff, workers in water, electricity, gas and oil, teachers, telecommunication workers, transport staff, workers in law and justice, religious staff, social security staff and retail banking staff. In doing so it marks a break with the neo-classical indifference to the social value of labour and points the way to 'valuing what matters.' It might help refocus attention on common needs and collective responsibilities.

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