



**PUBLIC SERVICES  
INTERNATIONAL**

*The global union federation of workers in public services*

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# Universal Quality

# Public Services

**A POLICY BRIEFING FOR TRADE UNIONS**



# Introduction

**T**he Covid-19 pandemic has put our public services across the world through the ultimate stress test. Frontline workers have been forced to face the brutal consequences of decades of underinvestment. Too many of them have paid with their lives.

We must not accept the myth that none of this could have been predicted, prepared for or avoided. For too long, politicians have signed on to the flawed belief that the public sector is an obstacle, that public services are inefficient and that public investment should be geared towards derisking private profits rather than building strong public institutions.

We were sold the narrative of individual choice over collective responsibility. We were told we must see ourselves as consumers rather than citizens.

Within this context, policy proposals such as Universal Basic Income were increasingly promoted as a means to address the worst outcomes of neoliberal inequality. Years of privatisation, outsourcing and budget cuts led many to give up on the idea of collective solutions. Instead, we were told Governments should hand revenue back to people as flat payments, to spend however they saw fit.

This report critically examines how the policy goals which many UBI proponents identify – including eliminating poverty, reducing inequality and strengthening social safety nets – are better addressed through Universal Quality Public Services, including free provision of childcare, transport, housing and aged-care.

Now the report's findings are more important than ever. If this pandemic has taught us anything, it's that none of us are isolated individuals. We are part of a global collec-

tive, with needs and challenges which simply cannot be addressed alone. This is not some abstract or philosophical point. As the WHO Director General, Tedros Adhanom, has said so clearly “none of us are safe until all of us are safe.”

Indeed our experiences through Covid-19 illustrate how there can be no replacement for quality public services. While the cheques Trump sent to every American helped many people through a moment of economic shock, they did nothing to reduce the death toll or resolve the crisis. In the UK, the failure of outsourcing corporation Serco to effectively manage the country's track and trace program reduced our ability to limit infections. In comparison, the UK vaccine roll out managed by the National Health Service – among the strongest public institutions in the world – has been praised for its incredible efficiency.

Across the world, we must reckon with the deep crisis of care this pandemic has exposed. Putting profits ahead of people in the aged-care sector has created dangerous conditions for both users and workers. Studies are already demonstrating that public, unionised aged-care homes have experienced much lower infection rates than privatised models. Meanwhile, research by PSI and CICTAR reveals how many of the care corporations profiting from the pandemic have spent years dodging taxes, depriving us of the ability to fund a public care system.

It is encouraging to see organisations like the IMF finally acknowledge the need to take urgent action to force corporations to pay their fair share and implement wealth taxes and other urgent revenue measures. These will be essential in ensuring the costs of this crisis do not fall once again on those who can least afford it.





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Increasing public revenue will allow us to decisively tackle rising unemployment by expanding our essential workforce. Even before the pandemic, the [World Health Organization](#), predicted the world would be short of 12.9 million healthcare workers by 2035. By 2030, countries have to recruit [69 million teachers](#). Ending poverty, tackling the climate crisis and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require a huge amount of essential work—with huge socially beneficial outcomes—for which the market alone simply will not provide funding. This can only be achieved by expanding the public realm, through interventions which improve our common economic and social wellbeing and ensure we are prepared for moments of crisis.

Yet even now, after billions of dollars in public funding has helped produce a number of effective vaccines, a handful of politicians in wealthy countries are continuing to block proposals which would treat the vaccine as a public good. Their ideological opposition to the idea of a collective commons is putting millions of lives at risk.

This demonstrates how important it is unions and our allies to shift the applause for frontline workers into action; to convert the

skyrocketing support for public services into political change which improves the lives of us all.

It's time to recognize the vital importance of public services in responding to our collective needs.

It's time to revalue the essential workers who provide these services.

And it's time to rebuild a resilient public sector – ready to keep us all safe and respond to whatever comes next.

The case for universal quality public services has never been stronger.

It's up to us to make them a reality.

**Rosa Pavanelli**  
General Secretary  
Public Services International

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# Understanding the Term UQPS

**W**e use the term ‘universal quality public services’ (UQPS) to sum up core ideas that underpin our objectives. They are best explained in reverse order.

- 1. Services:** collectively generated activities that provide access to everyday essentials.
- 2. Public:** activities that serve the public interest, generated and funded collectively through public institutions
- 3. Quality:** services that are designed and funded so that they achieve sufficient quality to enable people to meet their needs and flourish.
- 4. Universal:** everyone is entitled to services that are sufficient to meet their needs, regardless of ability to pay.

Our goal is to improve the quality of services that already exist in many countries such as healthcare and education, and reach into new areas such as child care care, adult social care, housing, transport and access to digital information. We believe that UQPS, alongside adequate and non-stigmatising systems for providing social security benefits to all who need it, are the best way to tackle urgent problems such as poverty, inequality, changing patterns of labour and political polarisation across the world.

The briefing builds on emerging literature and debate around ‘universal basic services’ (UBS), which encapsulates a similar set of ideas and goals.<sup>1</sup>



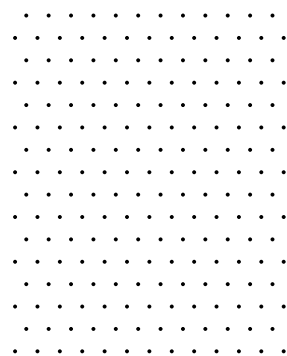
# Why we need UQPS

**A**ll of us, however much or little we earn, need certain things to make our lives possible – and worth living. A roof over our heads, nourishing food, education, people to look after us when we can't look after ourselves, healthcare when we are ill, transport to take us where we need to go, and (these days) access to digital information and communications as well as water, air and energy. We need money so that we can pay for some of these directly, such as food, but there are some things we could never afford to buy outright unless we were very rich. That's where UQPS come in. We pool resources through taxation and act together through public institutions to make sure everyone gets what they need when they need it.

UQPS echoes the ambitions of Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s and the post-war settlements that established welfare states in many countries. These recognised that the whole

of society is responsible for – and dependent upon – the wellbeing of every member of society. So it became widely accepted that, as well as take-home pay, people should receive a virtual income or 'social wage' in the form of public services and – for those unable to earn – state pensions and social security benefits. This was seen as boosting economic development as well as social wellbeing. Public services could meet needs where markets failed or where people's essential needs exceeded their means and helped to maintain a healthy productive workforce.

Public services are worth a great deal to everyone, and especially to those on low incomes, because they directly address their needs and do not have to be paid for out of pocket. Their full worth is even greater than their monetary replacement cost. Not only do public services increase economic growth but they also bring benefits





indirectly and over time, as we shall see, through the effects of services on the whole of society, not just the individuals who use them<sup>2</sup>.

From the 1970s onwards, government policies in many countries have undermined the financial and political value of the social wage. Services have been cut back and social security benefits eroded. Conditions on aid imposed by international financial institutions severely hindered investment in social infrastructure. The focus of politics has shifted from collective to market values; favouring individualism, choice, competition and privatisation. Trade unions have come under attack, weakening the power of collective bargaining. New technologies and production methods have changed patterns of employment, with fewer jobs in some sectors, more casualization of labour and suppressed wage levels. All these factors together have led to a deepening rift between rich and poor, heightened insecurity and millions living in destitution, even in the world's richest countries. Our goal is now to reverse that trend: to reclaim the collective ideal and rebuild the social wage.

We see UQPS as a powerful lever for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These recognise that 'ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change'.<sup>3</sup> In particular, Goals 3 and 4 aim for good health and wellbeing, and quality education, which best achieved for all through quality public services. UQPS could also help to promote (as we shall argue) gender equality, decent work, and responsible consumption and production, which are Goals 5, 8 and 12. Our approach builds on initiatives already underway in pursuit of SDGs. In recent years, notably, 'over half of

all African states have re-introduced some form of universal basic service provision'.<sup>4</sup> The SDGs provide a framework for UQPS at a global level and especially in developing countries.

In many poor countries, governments have been obliged to cut public spending and privatise state functions as a condition of receiving debt relief and development aid from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.<sup>5</sup> Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) have become a regular feature although they have largely failed to reduce poverty, and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) continue to be 'promoted as a solution to the shortfall in financing needed to achieve the SDGs', although there is evidence that they impose a heavier burden on citizens than on private sector partners, inflict high costs on the public purse, have negative impacts on the poor as well as on the natural environment, and lack transparency.<sup>6</sup>

UQPS offers an alternative to market-based strategies by promoting collective responsibility through public institutions. It does not insist on direct state provision of all services but recognises that there is bound to be a central role for the state in ensuring quality and universal reach in all service areas.



# Guiding Principles

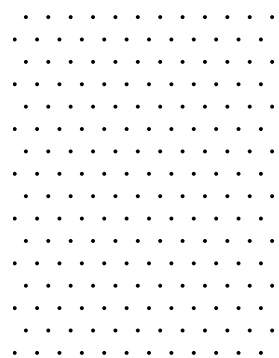
**T**he case for UQPS rests on the principles of shared needs and collective responsibilities. These don't belong to the neoliberal 'common sense' that has shaped our politics for too many decades. But they strike such a deep chord in our everyday experience and familiar feelings that, when you get to thinking about them, they are altogether more common and more sensible.

## SHARED NEEDS

All of us human beings have the same set of basic needs that must be satisfied in order to survive and thrive, think for ourselves and participate in society. Theories of capability and human need converge around this point. At the most fundamental level, we all need health and to be able to think for ourselves (what theorists describe variously as 'practical reason' and 'critical autonomy') in order to be able to engage and affiliate with others in society.<sup>7</sup>

These basic human needs are universal across time and space. Of course, the practical detail of how they are satisfied will vary widely, as norms,

resources and expectations shift and change between generations and countries. But there are certain means by which we meet our basic needs that are generic and enduring. These are described as 'intermediate needs' and have been listed by need theorists as water, nutrition, shelter, secure and non-threatening work, education, healthcare, security in childhood, significant primary relationships, physical and economic security, and a safe environment.<sup>8</sup> Unlike basic needs, intermediate needs may evolve over time. For example, recent efforts to identify 'a set of universal, irreducible and essential set of material conditions for achieving basic human wellbeing' have found that access to motorised



transport and to information and communications could be added the list.<sup>9</sup>

Needs are not like wants. Wants vary infinitely and can multiply exponentially. If you don't get what you want, you won't die or cease to be part of human society, but that could happen if you don't get what you need. Needs cannot usually be substituted for one another (a lack of water and shelter cannot be offset by more education or healthcare). They are part of an essential package. And needs are satiable: there are limits beyond which more food, more work or more security are no longer helpful and could even do harm. There comes a point where sufficiency is reached in the process of meeting needs. By contrast, there will never come a time when we all have everything we want.

Understanding the difference between needs and wants or preferences provides an enduring, evidence-based and ethical foundation for making decisions about what things are truly essential for the survival and wellbeing of everyone, now and in future. It doesn't trap us in any kind of uniform determinism, because we acknowledge that history, geography, politics and culture shape the specific ways in which needs are satisfied. But it helps us to set priorities that are more, rather than less, likely to be fair and sustainable.

## COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

As individuals today, we can meet some of our needs through market transactions, depending on our circumstances. For example, most of us expect to buy food and clothing for ourselves, and it matters a great deal whether or not we have enough money to do so. There are other needs that most of us cannot meet without help and we depend on others for our capacity to do so. Healthcare and education are the most common examples but, as we shall argue, the range of needs requiring a collective response is much

wider. If we are to live together in society, we are all responsible for ensuring that everyone's basic needs are met – through a combination of social security benefits and public services.

The political philosopher T.H. Marshall summed up the collective approach in the concept of 'social citizenship', which held that every member of society had positive economic and social rights as well as the more traditional civil and political rights that protect us from harm and safeguard our freedom. Trade unions have played a large part in defining, extending and defending those economic and social rights that are fundamental to social citizenship.<sup>10</sup>

Collective responsibility for meeting needs is exercised primarily through the state, by either directly providing services or by ensuring - through funding and regulation - that others do so. The nature of the need and how it can be met will partly determine whether the service is best provided directly. Historical, political and cultural factors will also play a part in determining how services are provided – as well as evidence of what works best. For example, it is broadly agreed in most countries that education is best provided directly by public institutions, while some transport and adult social care may be effectively delivered by non-government organisations. Almost invariably, delivering universal quality services is incompatible with profit-seeking, for reasons discussed below (p.xx). As the Geneva Charter makes clear: 'The private sector can be complementary to the public sector, but limiting the excesses of the market is central to maintaining democratic balance and ensuring equal rights and sustainability'.<sup>11</sup>

Collective responsibility implies mutual obligations as well as rights. It's a dynamic process where everyone gives and receives. Yet people cannot fulfil their obligations unless their basic needs are met. This interdependence provides the moral foundation for every

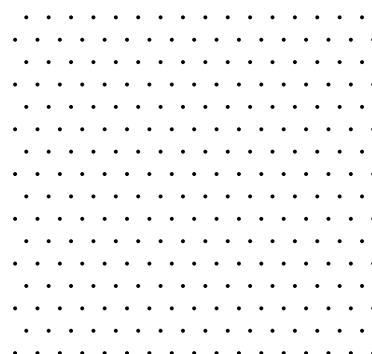


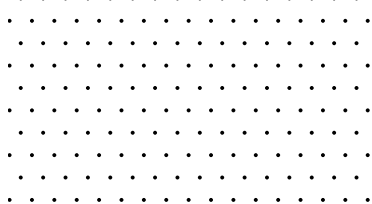
human society. The ‘moral economy’ underpins the material economy and ‘embodies norms and sentiments regarding the responsibilities and rights of individuals and institutions with regard to others’.<sup>12</sup>

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The third principle underpinning our agenda is sustainable development. There is now wide agreement that human activity must remain within the ecological constraints of the planet. Unless we heed the scientists’ predictions, there is real danger that, within a matter of decades, there will be no recognisable human society for which to plan or deliver public services. Therefore any policy that aims to improve human wellbeing must be designed to reduce harmful emissions, safeguard natural resources and stay within planetary boundaries.

The fact that UQPS are rooted in shared needs and collective responsibilities makes them far better placed to achieve sustainable practice than any welfare system based on market values and individual payments. In Africa for example, there is no convincing evidence of sustainable private sector investment in water, electricity or transport<sup>13</sup>. UQPS provide value not just for today, but into the future, for generations to come. This accords with the SDGs and with most frequently quoted definition of sustainable development, in the 1987 Brundtland Report, as meeting ‘the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.<sup>14</sup>





# Realising UQPS in Practice

**UQPS** is not a silver bullet or magical manifesto that claims to solve all our problems. We have to start by recognising that services differ from one another because they meet different kinds of need and they grow out of different historical and political circumstances. We have to build on what exists and learn from what happens when things go wrong, as well as from good practice.

This briefing focuses on services that make up the social infrastructure of a country, or what has been described as the ‘providential economy’.<sup>15</sup> While the material infrastructure is mainly about things, such as roads, railways, pipes and cables, public buildings and vehicles, the social or providential realm primarily involves human interaction, such as in health care, education and other caring and relational services and activities. Both kinds of infrastructure

comprise everyday necessities that are often invisible or taken for granted: they rarely get noticed until something goes wrong with them. The two are interdependent and intertwined – for example, education and caring services need facilities and equipment, while railway lines are useless without train services, and gas pipes need to be maintained. Much of what we say here about services in the social infrastructure will also apply to services in the material realm, such as those supplying water and energy.

We start by exploring key dimensions of public services, which may vary between countries and different areas of need. This will show how developing UQPS will involve a range of customised approaches to the design and delivery of different services. We then consider what features they should all have in common.

# UNCONDITIONAL BASIC INCOME

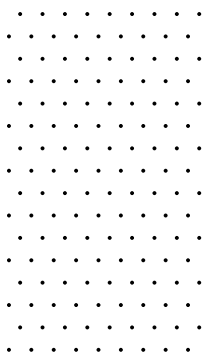
## RESPONSIBILITY AND POWER

It can be harder to achieve change when it is not clear where responsibility lies or where it is disconnected from power. Post-war welfare states recognised collective responsibility and most commonly located it with the state, so that services were provided directly by national or local government. But many services are now commissioned by governments from private or third sector organisations, with varying arrangements for regulation. Some have been wholly privatised, while others have been passed on to charities and community-based groups, relying on philanthropy and voluntarism for delivery. As a result, responsibilities are increasingly attenuated; spread out in various combinations, with government, commercial businesses, non-profit, charitable and voluntary organisations assuming different degrees of responsibility in different settings.

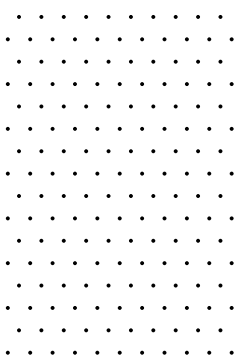
Outsourcing is rarely more efficient, often undermines quality and the universal nature of services, and tends to allow a few commercial heavyweights to dominate the market in many services. As this happens, power shifts away from public institutions and the very notion of collective responsibility can begin to dissolve. The values of social citizenship give way to individual self-help and market-based consumption.

UQPS requires varying combinations of strong central government funding, regulation and public provision depending on the nature of the services. Crucially, services should be responsive to people's needs and seek to empower them, engaging them where possible in the design and delivery of services.

To this end, services should be devolved to the lowest level possible whilst maintaining their essential characteristics. In responding to users'







needs, UQPS will enable them to make choices, but this should not be confused with market rhetoric about consumer choice, which is linked to ability to pay. Experience has shown that, unless everyone has similar amounts of information, skills and confidence, choice will only empower the better off and better educated.<sup>16</sup> And choice is often illusory because there is little or nothing to choose between.<sup>17</sup> So market rules won't fix problems of poor quality and unequal access to services. What's required for UQPS is active support for a democratising state that strengthens local government, fosters a wider range of delivery models, develops stronger participation in decisions about services by residents and service users, establishes clear entitlements, ensures adequate funding and supports service workers.

## DEVOLUTION AND LOCALISM

There is substantial support for devolving more power to local areas and for applying the principle of 'subsidiarity' (exercising power at the lowest level possible to achieve defined goals).<sup>18</sup> This can bring services closer to the people who use them. It can also provide more opportunities for them to exercise influence and control. But devolution is not always progressive. For some, it means shifting responsibility and power away from government to locally based businesses, charities and other non-government organisations, shrinking the state and reducing government funding or withdrawing it altogether.<sup>19</sup> Many fear that devolution will weaken the bargaining power of trade unions, fragment existing services and lead to greater inequalities between localities.<sup>20</sup>

Devolution is more likely to be progressive within a clear democratic framework based on shared public values and universalism, where power is shared between national and local

government, with more control in the hands of residents, service users and service workers, where funding is adequate and where central government retains key responsibilities (see below p.xx). Creating structures that directly engage users and trade unions in planning the process of devolution and, once this has happened, in devolved governance, will guard against risks and achieve quality services.<sup>21</sup>

## A RANGE OF DELIVERY MODELS

Beyond direct state ownership, there is a wide range of organisations providing services including social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals, user-led organisations, registered charities and community groups organised around neighbourhoods or shared needs and interests.<sup>22</sup> Many of these occupy the space described as the 'social and solidarity economy', employing more than 5 million people and with 123 million participating members across the European Union.<sup>23</sup> Partnerships are often formed between public bodies and NGOs for the purpose of delivering services. In the UK, the Trades Union Congress has recommended a strategic alliance between unions and the co-operative movement in order to find new ways of organising in a rapidly changing world of work.<sup>24</sup>

The type, size and structure of an organisation may determine how far its own purpose is aligned with the public interest, and how well it is equipped to bid for government contracts, handle money, plan for the future, invest in improvement, recruit, and train and retain staff, and give them decent pay and conditions, and how likely it is to share control with people who use services.

Even with strong regulation, for-profit provision by the private sector tends towards monopoly and perverse social outcomes. Commercial imperatives do not disappear even under strong regulatory oversight. Too often,

fund investors and shareholders ‘have no inhibitions about using the devices of extraction and exploitation’.<sup>25</sup> It has been proposed that all organisations that contract with government to provide goods and services to the public should have public status and explicitly share the same set of public interest goals, including ‘equity, participation, quality of service, accountability, transparency, solidarity and public ethos’.<sup>26</sup> A system of social licencing, proposed by the Manchester School, would make the right to trade dependent on ‘providing a service, plus meeting negotiated criteria of community responsibility on issues such as sourcing, training and payment of living wages’.<sup>27</sup> This follows current practice in many European countries and could lend force and definition to the otherwise woolly concept of ‘corporate social responsibility’. In addition, such an approach could allow for wide range of delivery models without prompting a turn towards neoliberal privatisation.

## PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS

Decisions about public services are matter of collective responsibility, exercised through democratic government. The quality of services and their capacity to address the needs of all, will be keenly influenced by how key decisions are made and who participates in them, how they participate and to what effect. This is important at different stages – from macro-level decisions about what services are required, and how they are designed and funded, to micro-level decisions that affect the way services are experienced directly by individuals.

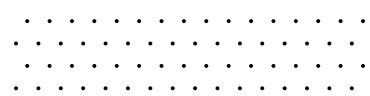
In many countries over the last two decades, it has become quite common for public authorities to engage local residents and groups of service users in discussions on how to plan the services they fund. There has been a similar trend among non-government

service providers, many of whom now have policies that support user participation. Opinion surveys, focus groups, citizens’ panels, community forums and deliberative workshops have come to feature regularly in the dealings of local authorities and other funding bodies.

Ways of engaging workers in decisions about service design and delivery are less well developed. Front-line workers often have better insights into how to improve service quality than their employers (who tend to operate from a greater distance). Involving them in the design and delivery of UQPS with the support of their unions could help to bring about more robust and effective delivery of services.

At the macro level, a robust democratic framework for making decisions will be essential. The New Economics Foundation (among others) has proposed ‘a dialogue that combines lay people along with professionals (in service delivery, for example) and other experts, and with democratically elected representatives’.<sup>28</sup> This approach could be used at local, regional or national level to determine what needs should be met collectively and to design and fund services and other appropriate activities. It combines elements of participatory and representative democracy, and builds on experience of citizens’ juries, deliberative polling, people’s forums, town hall meetings and similar initiatives in the US, Europe and elsewhere. It is not intended to replace representative democracy but to revive and enrich it by drawing closer to the views, values and everyday experiences of the people it is supposed to represent.

For micro-level decisions, the extent to which people actually participate varies widely, from receiving information and being consulted, to being actively engaged and co-producing services at the planning, design and delivery stages. Co-production involves services





# SOCIAL BENEFITS



users and workers forming equal partnerships, combining lay and expert knowledge to develop ways of meeting needs.<sup>29</sup>

Some engagement exercises have managed to improve the scope and quality of services and to strengthen local support for them. Some have helped to ease the pain of service cuts and build alliances between voluntary and publicly funded organisations. Others have just made people fed up and cynical, because their participation has made no perceptible difference.

At all levels of decision-making, everything depends on how engagement is organised, how far power shifts towards residents and service users, how genuinely their views are sought and heeded, and how results feed through to decisions and action.

Effective participation calls for profound changes in the way service workers think, act and interact with others. Trade unions have a critical role to play in ensuring that workers are valued and supported, and able to help shape the changes, which 'include being able to see and harness the assets that people have, to make room for people to develop for themselves, and to use a wide variety of methods for working with people rather than processing them'.<sup>30</sup> It entails a change of focus 'away from a culture of "caring for" to a culture of enabling and facilitating, but the skill-set must also

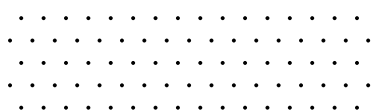
be able to change systems and operate on a large scale'.<sup>31</sup> Public spending cuts have often severely limited the capacity of workers to interact effectively with service users, curtailing the time they have to do the job and imposing processes that dehumanise relationships.

## ENTITLEMENT AND CONDITIONALITY

Inherent in the idea of UQPS is the principle that people have equal rights to services when they need them. This implies a range of entitlements shared by all who are eligible for services. They would include 'positive' social rights to services and resources.

For social rights to be realised, they should ideally be codified in law and be accompanied by a robust framework of 'procedural rights', that is, systems and protocols that enable people to know and claim what they are entitled to by means that are fair, accessible, timely and affordable. They would have to be established and upheld through institutions of the state, which would also have to ensure that corresponding duties and duty-bearers were identified and suitably resourced and supported to fulfil their duties.<sup>32</sup>

That said entitlements to services are unlikely to be enforced without sustained political support. Trade unions have a vital role to play in campaigning





for universal equal rights to quality services, and establishing the best ways to realise and enforce those rights.

If there are entitlements to services, who is entitled? Fundamentally, entitlement is universal – for all who need the service regardless of ability to pay. Yet services and entitlement are a matter for national governments and vary between countries. There are mutual obligations embodied in the concept of collective responsibilities: a reciprocal arrangement (or social contract) whereby everyone gives and receives. As we have noted, quality public services should enable people to meet their needs and therefore be able to fulfil their obligations and contribute to society. Leading economist Tony Atkinson put forward the idea of entitlement based on resident participation,<sup>33</sup> This could be broadly defined as making a social contribution – for example by full or part time waged employment or self-employment, by education, training or active job search, by home care for children or the elderly or disabled, or by regular voluntary work in a recognised association, or a portfolio of activities equalling around 35 hours per week for those capable of making such a contribution.<sup>34</sup> It has been described as ‘a move towards a reimagined social citizenship, based on plural identities and rights conferred on residents rather than on passport-holders’.<sup>35</sup>

## ROLE OF SERVICE WORKERS

Services fundamentally depend on people and relationships – as do their quality. Good training, decent pay and job security are essential building blocks for achieving quality.

How service workers are organised and how far they are able to influence the quality of services as well as their own pay and conditions is a critical factor here. As we have noted, they have a crucial role to play in developing UQPS,

shaping patterns of devolution, ownership and participation, campaigning for decent funding and for meaningful, inclusive equity of access.

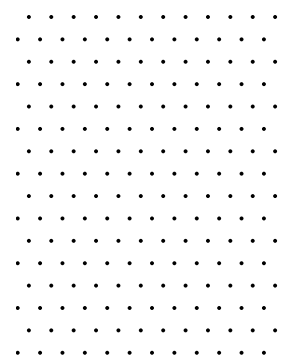
Workers in small, locally based organisations are less likely to belong to trade unions and might therefore be more vulnerable to exploitation. Where unions are able to organise workers across a range of workplaces, including those engaged through digital platforms, there are opportunities to improve co-ordination and consistent standards for the benefit of service users, as well as to improve and maintain decent pay, training and conditions for service workers.

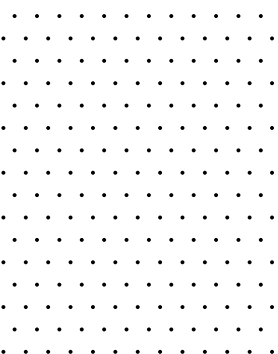
The UK public sector union UNISON has introduced an Ethical Care Charter which sets out a strategy for achieving better pay and working conditions for workers in order to improve standards of care. An evaluation of the Charter’s effects has found that where authorities have monitored its impact ‘they have reported improvements in recruitment and retention and thus the quality of care, as well as improving the working lives of homecare workers and starting to recognise the value of their contribution to society’.<sup>36</sup>

It should never be forgotten that service workers need public services to meet their needs in the same way as everyone else. Quality services will enable them to provide quality services to others. If they are well educated and trained, properly valued, adequately paid and enjoy decent working conditions, they are not only more likely to do a good job, but they are also less likely to have problems (such as ill health) that impair their wellbeing and trigger demand for public services.

## FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

Funding will make a crucial difference to how far people have genuinely equal access according to need not ability





to pay, as well as to the quality of services and to the pay and conditions of service workers. What matters is how far funds for services are sufficient and secure over time, where they come from and how they are distributed

Typically, major public services are fully funded through taxation, with levels of funding determined by government policy. In many cases, government bodies fully fund contracted-out services; they also give grants to third-sector organisations to enable them to undertake various activities, often expecting them to raise further funds elsewhere, which may prove difficult or impossible. Businesses sometimes invest but only where they anticipate comfortable returns. As we have noted, funding in developing countries is often dependent on embracing market rules and private sector providers, yet there is no evidence that markets are best placed to meet needs.

Philanthropic giving is an increasingly important source of funds as public expenditures are cut. Philanthropy has many virtues, but it cannot ‘substitute fair and reasonable taxation to finance quality public services in all communities’.<sup>37</sup> Voluntary activity (unpaid labour) also provides substantial resources: at their best, public services should recognise, value and support informal carers and other kinds of voluntary activity, and ensure that these are sensibly integrated with formal provision. Often, however, informal carers and volunteers are routinely undervalued and exploited.<sup>38</sup> The highly gendered nature of care work means that this has a disproportionate impact on women and can reinforce existing inequalities and systems of gender bias.

Service users often have to make a financial contribution and the level may be means-tested. In some cases public funds are distributed to individuals as direct payments or vouchers, which can be used to buy what they need or want (and can afford).<sup>39</sup> Part payments

and vouchers run the risk of undermining quality restricting access and exacerbating inequalities.

Since our goal is to improve quality, access and equality, ensuring sufficient and secure funding is of primary importance. Our vision is based on the principle of collective responsibility, which implies that the primary source of funding should be the state, with funds raised through taxation. Countries that receive international aid should not be obliged to adopt market-based approaches to service provision.

It is also important to remember that public funds are required for other dimensions of a progressive policy agenda. One example is making the transition to a sustainable economy, which means developing renewable energy, retrofitting homes, transforming transport systems and much more. Another is reforming social security (or social protection) so that everyone has access to a living income as well as a social wage. We consider the overall costs of UQPS below, p.xx.

## THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The quality and scope of UQPS depend on how all these variables are combined in each service area and how they interact. We may envisage a landscape where different kinds of organisation, as well as different models of delivery and control, co-exist and where services workers and people who use services play a variety of roles to suit different circumstances.

The role of the state is first and foremost to ensure that people get what they need. This point is usefully articulated by the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE), which sets out a vision for local government in the UK. Accordingly, local authorities and other public institutions have a duty of stewardship: to ensure the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of

the area for which they are responsible. This combines ‘core capacity’ with ‘collaboration’ by ‘maintaining the strategic advantages of in-house services to meet local needs’ as well as ‘working with a range of service providers on a co-operative and collaborative basis rather than through competition’.<sup>40</sup>

Beyond direct delivery where appropriate, the state has four key functions. It ensures equality of entitlement and access to services, for all according to need not ability to pay. It sets and enforces ethical and quality standards throughout all services. It collects, invests and distributes funds through taxation to support equality and universal quality services, across all areas of need. And it coordinates activities across sectors and services, to maximise positive impacts.

All this points to a new dynamic between ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ politics, and significant changes in the culture and practice of public authorities. Government officials should see it as their role to encourage inclusive participation and local control, welcome innovation, facilitate diverse activities, actively support the efforts of local organisations to meet quality standards (instead of just policing them), and invest adequate resources equitably between different groups and localities. This is about changing whole systems, not making piecemeal reforms.

There are lessons to be learned from cities such as Barcelona in Spain, Bologna in Italy, Ghent in Belgium, Cleveland in Ohio, USA and Preston in Lancashire, UK, where public authorities have committed themselves in various ways to enabling local people to gain more control over access to life’s necessities. In Barcelona, for example, Barcelona En Comú, described as a ‘citizen platform’, has led the city government in promoting what it calls a collaborative economy, including many hundreds of co-operatives and other community-led and

public interest organisations.<sup>41</sup> The Flemish city of Ghent has endorsed an ambitious ‘commons transition plan’, which promotes a model of ‘poly-governance’, with state, markets and civil society working together to support and scale up locally generated social and economic initiatives.<sup>42</sup> What these ventures show is a willingness to transform relationships between local government and local residents, shifting power outwards to a wide variety of groups and organisations, many of which could – or already do – play a part in designing and delivering services under local control.

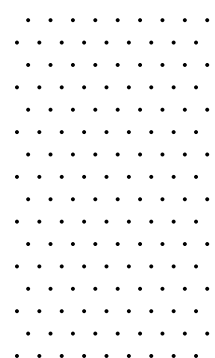
## UQPS AND EMPLOYMENT

The process of improving and extending public services is likely to generate more jobs. In most parts of the social infrastructure, particularly in care and education, quality services depend on human relationships and require skills developed through training and experience. Martin Ford, author of *The Rise of the Robots: Technology and the threat of a jobless future*, reckons that three kinds of employment will remain resilient to automation: jobs that are creative, relational and responsive to emergencies.<sup>43</sup> Many public service jobs fall into these categories. As we point out below (p.xx), they are not directly linked to downturns in the market and can act as a counter-cyclical buffer to help stabilise the economy and maintain security for many workers.

## COMMON FEATURES

Taking all these factors into account, we recognise that – while each area of need will require a customised approach to UQPS – there are certain features that should apply across all service areas.

- Collective responsibility for meeting shared needs will be exercised by





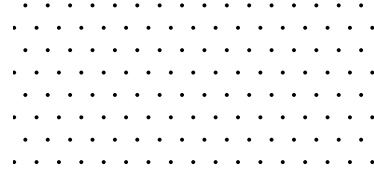
the state through democratically elected governments.

- Power will be devolved to the lowest appropriate level (according to the principle of subsidiarity).
- Many services are best provided within the public sector. There is a high burden of proof for services to be provided by the for-profit sector, even where strong regulation exists. Some may be provided by non-profit organisations, as long as well documented risks associated with non-government provision do not compromise critical human needs.
- Where organisations outside the state are involved in service provision, it is essential that they share a clear set of enforceable public interest obligations.
- Services will be universally accessible, 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.
- Universal entitlement will be underpinned by clear rules and procedures, backed up by strong state support
- There will be sufficient and secure funding.
- Service workers will have decent training, job opportunities, pay and conditions, secured through union recognition and collective bargaining at organisation or sector level.
- Investment in social partnership structures will enable service workers to be engaged in service design and fully committed to improving service quality.
- The state will ensure equality of access, implement strong quality standards, raise and invest funds, and coordinate functions between services.

## POTENTIAL COST OF UQPS

Costings for all proposed new services, plus the improvements that should be made to existing universal services will vary between services and between countries. It is beyond our scope here to calculate them in specific detail. In the Appendix we have provided some indicative costs for each proposed new area, using sample data from a range of sources. To make these relatively consistent across countries we have used a percentage of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as the common metric. Most OECD countries already spend significant amounts on health, care, transport and access to digital information, and some services in some countries already offer universal access. In no country is a full range of our proposed services provided universally. We estimate that the total additional annual expenditure required for the services we propose, if implemented all at once and provided universally, would be around 4.3 % GDP in a typical OECD country.

To put this in perspective, our figure represents less than 15% of total government spending in every OECD country except Colombia and Chile.<sup>44</sup> In the late 1940s, UK government spending rose by some 20% GDP to fund post-war reconstruction and the new welfare state. More recently in 2008 both UK and USA governments increased public spending by more than 6% of GDP on bailing out private banks to cope with the financial crisis.<sup>45</sup> While these events are not directly comparable, they do suggest that, when governments decide to increase spending, it is more a matter of political choice than applying rules of contemporary economics.



Furthermore, our costings don't account for the potential savings that can be generated by a radical shift towards UQPS. First, there are likely to be economies of scale where needs are met collectively rather than individually. In Sri Lanka for example, health outcomes are comparable to some European countries and since 1970s, the majority of people have lived within 5km of a health centre. The factors explaining include a strong public service ethos, internal purchasing controls and investment decisions that benefit from economies of scale<sup>46</sup>. Secondly, we want services to be organised to enable people to co-produce – as far as possible – the ways in which their needs are met. By bringing unmodified human resources into the process, this can not only improve the wellbeing of the individuals concerned – provided they are adequately supported – but also improve the quality and scope of the services without a corresponding increase in the overall cost. We believe this can be done by transforming the policies and practices of public institutions, rather than by 'dumping' state responsibilities on poor communities. Thirdly, collective action to meet needs can prevent harm that would otherwise require more costly 'downstream' interventions by public services - for example, decent child-care and housing for all who need it can improve wellbeing and reduce demands for healthcare services. An analysis conducted for 74 low and middle income countries found that increasing health expenditure by just \$5 a person with a focus on preventative health measures could yield up to nine times that value in economic and social benefits including greater GDP growth and the prevention of needless deaths<sup>47</sup>. Fourthly and relatedly, UQPS can generate considerable returns on investment in social and ecological as well as economic terms.

As we have noted, UQPS must go hand in hand with a system of social security

benefits that is sufficient and non-stigmatising, so that those who are unable to earn enough to live on are nevertheless able to lead a life they value and to flourish. There are various proposals for income support (often described as 'social protection' or 'income support') and some are more compatible with UQPS than others.

For example, some proposals for universal basic income (UBI) envisage giving everyone – regardless of need – regular, unconditional cash payments that are sufficient to live on.<sup>48</sup> Among progressives, the aim is generally to provide income security and eliminate the stigmatising and punitive elements of many existing social security systems. This is admirable, but the costs are very high and probably not justifiable if compared to alternative uses such as funding UQPS based on need. The International Labour Office (ILO) has calculated the potential costs of this kind of UBI scheme in 130 countries, and found that 'for most world regions, the average costs . . . are in the range of 20 to 30 per cent of GDP.'<sup>49</sup> Partial schemes (where payments are universal but well short of sufficient) are more affordable, but are usually presented as a step on the way to a fully sufficient UBI. After exhaustive modelling, one leading analyst concludes that 'an affordable UBI is inadequate and an adequate UBI is unaffordable'.<sup>50</sup>

It makes sense – and is certainly more affordable – to combine UQPS with a scheme whereby everyone has the right to an agreed minimum income, with support provided for those whose income falls below that level. A well-rounded programme of UQPS would in any case represent a virtual income and relieve people of the need to pay directly for some of life's essentials.

# Applying the Principles of UQPS to Specific Areas of Need

**H**ealthcare and schooling are services where the principles of UQPS (exercising collective responsibility to meet shared needs) are already applied in many countries - albeit in different ways and often imperfectly. There are important lessons to be learned from healthcare and schooling. We set out two examples below.

## FOCUS ON PREVENTION

The first, which comes mainly from the healthcare sector, is a continuing failure to focus on the underlying causes of ill health. It is health, after all, that is our basic need and healthcare is only one way of meeting it. Most long-term health conditions (such as diabetes, many cancers, pulmonary and heart disease) are avoidable and yet they are the main source of pressure on health care services. There is no shortage of evidence about their causes and what can be done to prevent them, most of which falls well beyond the remit of healthcare (housing, education, diet, exercise, air quality, employment conditions, poverty and powerlessness).

<sup>51</sup> This calls for a far stronger policy focus, backed up by resources, on co-ordinating services and other collective activities, beyond healthcare, that prevent illness and help people to stay well. The aim should be a healthier population and health equality, not a bigger health service.

## EFFECTS OF CHOICE AND COMPETITION

The second, which comes mainly from the education sector, is the danger of elevating choice and competition above collective responsibility.

Education is an important determinant of health and provides a crucial underpinning for meeting all our shared needs. It should be available to all in equal measure. This is not about uniformity but about everyone having equal access to education of a comparable standard, so that no one is left behind. This calls into question the validity of public subsidies (in the form of tax breaks for registered charities) to fee-paying schools; the proliferation in some countries of schools operating beyond local democratic control; and admissions criteria and catchment areas that separate pupils by class, religion and ethnicity. If UQPS means exercising collective responsibility for meeting shared needs, the privileges and preferences (or wants) of some parents should not make it more difficult to meet the needs of others.

Rolling out the UQPS agenda must include radical improvements in existing services as well as reaching out into new areas. In the Appendix we consider in more detail how to develop UQPS in childcare and adult social care, where there are some free services in many countries, but seldom enough to meet everyone's needs sufficiently. We also consider how the approach can be extended beyond the care sector to housing, transport and access to digital information.





# Potential Benefits of UQPS

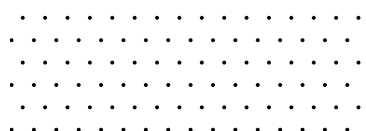
**UQPS** offers benefits that range across four dimensions: equity, efficiency, solidarity and sustainability. Here, our analysis refers to existing services such as healthcare and schooling, and to the new services we map out in the following chapters. Collectively generated activities to meet other areas of need, provided they are well organised and supported, may have similar effects.

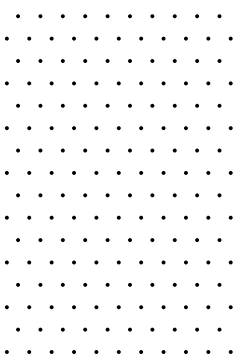
## EQUALITY

Public services reduce income inequalities by providing a social wage that is worth much more to people on the lowest incomes. A study of OECD countries found that poor people would have to spend three quarters of their income on essential services such as healthcare and education if they had to purchase them directly. Services reduced income inequality by an average of 20%. Modelling by the Institute for Global Prosperity found that extending public services to new areas such as transport and access to digital information would have far greater value, proportionately, to low-income households than to rich ones.<sup>52</sup> A detailed

analysis of the distributional effects of the social wage in the UK in 2002 confirmed a consistent pro-poor bias in most services,<sup>53</sup> which had increased over two decades and continues to this day. A similar pattern is likely to prevail in other countries.

Services bring benefits without which individuals and families would be unable to meet their needs and flourish. Getting an education makes it easier to find work and earn money; access to housing and healthcare means there is less risk of becoming disabled by illness and dependent on care; access to transport and the Internet makes it possible to get work, avoid isolation, use other services, and so





on. These things are especially important for low-income families because of the knock-on effects that shield them against accumulating risks and vulnerabilities.

The effects are not just individual: reducing inequalities will benefit society as a whole. As Pickett and Wilkinson have demonstrated, outcomes for a range of health and social problems (physical and mental health, drug abuse, education, imprisonment, obesity, social mobility, trust and community life, violence, teen pregnancies and child wellbeing) are significantly worse in more unequal rich countries.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, the extent and consistency of the redistributive effects depends on how universal services are designed, delivered and funded – as well as how they interact with each other.

## EFFICIENCY

Efficiency is usually measured in terms of the ratio between inputs and outputs: the greater the amount of useful output per unit of input, the more efficient the process is deemed to be. In public policy, inputs can refer to expenditure of resources, such as money or labour, as well as government regulation. Outputs refer to the implementation of legislation and the delivery of specific transfers and services, such as social care or clinical procedures. Outcomes refer to the broader and longer-term impacts on individuals (such as poverty and mortality) or on social distributions (e.g. levels of inequality). They will be influenced by how services interact with each other, as well as by a wide range of social, cultural and economic conditions. Given these complexities, measures of efficiency in the public sector are usually complex and contested.

Public services have often been accused of inefficiencies, which market theorists have attributed to lack of competition and the vested interests

of bureaucrats and professions. These shortcomings have been used to justify introducing market rules into public services from the 1980s onwards. But competition between multiple providers, customer choice for service users and conventional cost-efficiency criteria for measuring success have largely failed to improve outputs, let alone outcomes. These failings have been greatly exacerbated by public spending cuts in many countries. Getting ‘more for less’ by cutting staff or increasing workload to compete in a quasi-marketplace has generally proved to be self-defeating.

Private contracts tend to be inflexible and limit the ability of public authorities to improve services and respond to changing demands<sup>55</sup>. Transaction costs are often higher for both consumers and providers, not least because a for-profit system extracts funds to pay dividends to shareholders. Public sector organisations can keep costs down in ways that cannot be achieved by competing commercial organisations – for example, through sharing administrative, purchasing and research functions, by avoiding duplication and by working together to achieve shared goals<sup>56</sup>. Moral hazards are encountered when profit incentives combine with unequal knowledge in markets. For example, private medical providers may have profit-related incentives to undertake unnecessary medical interventions, while patients know too little to judge whether they are right or wrong.<sup>57</sup>

Turning to outcomes efficiency, there are further advantages to a public – rather than market-based – system in many service areas. Where collective activities are intended to serve the public interest, receive funding from public sources and share a democratic framework, they are, in theory at least, better able to interact in mutually beneficial ways – and they can be co-ordinated to do so by public authorities.

One example is where schools encourage healthy eating and active pursuits, making people healthier; others are where bus services enable people to get to work, or where high quality child-care helps children to get more out of primary education.

Definitive studies of the efficiency of public services are rare, and most that do exist focus on healthcare and cost-efficiency. A 2016 study compared spending on health care and average life expectancy in OECD countries. It found the USA, which is a mainly market-based system, outspent the UK in 2014 by the equivalent of £6,311 per person, compared with £2,777, yet had an average life expectancy at birth of 78.8 years, compared with 81.4 in the UK.<sup>58</sup>

Calculations of efficiency routinely overlook the multiple dimensions of value, the many ways in which value is experienced and how it accrues. Applying social value analysis to assessing service efficiency means taking account of longer-term, indirect effects as well as short-term direct ones.<sup>59</sup> For example, if staff delivering meals on wheels to people who are housebound take time to sit and chat with them, this may reduce their sense of social isolation and generally improve their wellbeing, but it will increase costs by demanding additional staff time. Some forms of social value take years to accumulate, with no immediate tangible benefits; often, they accrue in ways that do not return dividends of any kind to the organisation that made the investment in the first place. Nevertheless they can yield substantial returns on investment over time, which are routinely overlooked because they are hard to measure, not because they lack value.

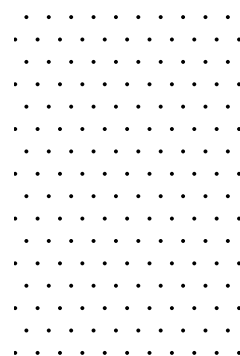
There is a clear disconnect between conventional ways of assessing efficiency on the one hand, and notions of value that are anchored in whole systems and human relationships, on the other. It has prompted many to

challenge the dominance of economic growth as an indicator of national progress and the norms of cost-efficiency accounting. Some countries have begun to measure human wellbeing, alongside GDP (gross domestic product), as an indicator of national progress. Michel Bauwens, founder of the Peer-to-Peer Foundation (P2P) has called for a major 'Value Shift': instead of rewarding 'extractive' practices 'that enrich some at the expense of the others', we should reward 'generative' practices that enrich the social and environmental resources to which they are applied.<sup>60</sup> The efficiency of universal quality public services may best be judged from this perspective – by how far they lead to outcomes that renew local assets, safeguard planetary boundaries and nurture human flourishing.

## SOLIDARITY

The concepts of shared needs and collective responsibilities embody the idea of solidarity, and the practice of UQPS, as we have defined it, has potential to develop and strengthen solidarity. We 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 and groups who are 'strangers' to each other. It involves collective action towards shared objectives.<sup>61</sup>

As a policy goal, UQPS calls for collective policy and practice: sharing resources and acting together to deal with risks and problems that people cannot cope with alone. It is not something that can be achieved by individuals or groups simply fending for themselves and pursuing their own interests. It not only requires solidarity but also contributes to it – in three main ways. First, it develops experience of shared needs and collective responsibility, which builds understanding of how people





depend on each other and a commitment to retaining these interconnections. Secondly, where services bring people together from different social groups, they can provide opportunities for developing mutual sympathy and responsibility. Thirdly, the combined effects of more and better services, as we have noted, bring benefits to society as a whole and have a redistributive effect, reducing inequalities that otherwise create barriers to solidarity.

Richard Titmuss famously demonstrated that a market-based blood donation service is likely to be less effective than a collective one based on voluntary donations.<sup>62</sup> In another much-cited case, nursery staff decided to fine parents who collected their children late, to encourage good time-keeping, but parents interpreted the fine as payment for services and felt able to 'buy themselves out of their social contract', defeating the object of the exercise.<sup>63</sup>

Some have argued that welfare states – and thereby public services – 'crowd out' social capital by inhibiting informal caring networks, mutual trust and social norms that favour civil commitment and trustworthiness. However, it is not the existence of public services that carries this risk, but how they work – in whose interests, under whose control and with what outcomes. There is evidence that Nordic-style welfare regimes, where there are more universal services and a stronger collective ethos, tend to have higher, rather than lower, levels of bonding and bridging social capital.<sup>64</sup>

## SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability involves, at its simplest, an inherent 'capacity for continuance'. That suggests a system that can function in ways that continue to achieve its desired goals over time. UQPS could have positive impacts on sustainability through prevention of harm, through economic stabilisation and through

helping to mitigate climate change and the depletion of natural resources.

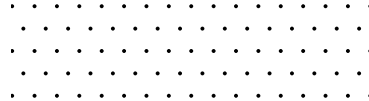
It is hard to over-state the importance of measures that address the upstream causes of social, economic and environmental harm. Failure to do so cannot be justified on ethical or practical grounds, because of the untold human misery and incalculable costs of dealing with crises and catastrophes when things go wrong.

Preventative services not only help people to stay well and flourish; they can also reduce demand for a range of services, not just healthcare. Unemployment, anti-social behaviour, and many forms of crime, for example, have roots in poverty and deprivation, which can be significantly reduced by a more generous 'social wage'.

The two basic foundations of prevention are, first, a scientific understanding of cause and effect and the possibility of prediction, and second, a capacity for controlled government intervention in social life.<sup>65</sup> So despite past failures, effective prevention will entail an enlarged and more integrated role for public intervention – of which UQPS is a crucial component.

Where the economy is concerned, public services can help to stabilise fluctuations by generating relatively secure employment. While they are vulnerable to cuts in government spending, they are not directly linked to downturns in the market. Public sector bodies, together with non-government organisations with whom they work in partnership tend to support employment solidarity and can act as a counter cyclical buffer, helping to offset the effects of market downturns and recession, contributing to the economy's 'capacity for continuance'. Welfare payments to those falling below a certain threshold are also strongly countercyclical unlike UBI which provides economic stimulus to high income earners in boom times and no





extra fiscal stimulus to the needy during downturns.

The most profound threat to human flourishing is that of climate collapse and extreme environmental stress, as we have noted. The entire edifice of environmental sustainability is premised on prevention – or mitigation as it is called because some future heating of the planet cannot now be prevented. This provides strong justification for UQPS.

A move towards more and better public services is likely to prove more environmentally sustainable than a market based system. For a start, UQPS can play a vital role in switching the entire economy from a fixation on economic growth to a concern for human wellbeing within planetary limits. Public provisioning systems are better able than market systems to promote sustainable consumption, to coordinate sustainable practices such as active travel, resource-efficient buildings and local food procurement, and to implement national strategies for reducing GHG emissions. Where governments issue guidance on good environmental practice, public sector organisations are more likely to help develop the guidance and comply with it because they share public interest values. Where public bodies work with non-government partners or sub-contractors, they can spread sustainable practices among a wider range of institutions.

There is some evidence that collectively provided services have a smaller ecological footprint than privately funded alternatives. For example, the US healthcare system directly accounts for 8 per cent of emissions in the US, compared with the UK system, where 3 per cent of emissions directly stem from the NHS.<sup>66</sup> This is due both to the greater macro-efficiency and lower expenditure shares of healthcare in the UK, and to lower emissions per pound or dollar spent, which is thought to be a result of better resource allocation

and procurement practices. There is also some evidence that more extensive welfare states are generally better suited to adopting and implementing pro-environmental policies, especially where they embody ideas about shared needs and collective responsibilities.

Where utilities are concerned, our strategy for UQPS can greatly improve environmental sustainability. In the face of power shortages and lack of an effective energy infrastructure, many people in Sub Saharan Africa are forced to use high carbon diesel generators that directly profit multinational corporations in the Global North<sup>67</sup>. UQPS investment in this area could arguably provide considerable economic, social and environmental returns as well as tackling unequal trade relationships.

Public services perform important precautionary environmental and climate functions in their own right – and trade unions have a vital role to play in emergency planning and relief.<sup>68</sup> 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 on Cuba (where only two died) demonstrated the importance of collective ethos and public services in dealing with climate-related risks.

Finally, public services have a vital role to play in ensuring that sustainable policies are socially just. For example, programmes to retrofit the vast bulk of the housing stock, proposed for the UK as part of a Green New Deal, will require public planning, finance and management. If government can coordinate the range of services effectively, they can offset any regressive effects of climate policies (such as higher energy prices) and ensure a ‘just transition’ to sustainable living.

# In Conclusion:

## Summary Points

1. 'UQPS' describes services and other activities that are essential and sufficient to enable people to meet their needs and flourish, available for all regardless of ability to pay.
2. It rests on the principles of collective responsibility and shared needs - exercising the first to meet the second - and is anchored in sustainable development.
3. The agenda includes healthcare, education and other existing universal services, and extends into new areas such as childcare, adult social care, housing, transport and information, as well as to water and energy.
4. This approach is closely aligned with the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and is a crucial strategy for realising them.
5. Promoting UQPS requires a customised approach to each area of need. It is not about uniformity or top-down delivery. It is a system that involves a variety of collective activities with strong participation by service workers and users – and to which people have universal and equal rights of access.
6. It calls for a new dynamic between top-down and bottom-up politics, with power devolved as far as possible. Central government has four key functions: to ensure equality of access, to set and enforce standards, to collect and invest funds, and to coordinate functions across sectors to maximise social, environmental and economic outcomes.
7. There are important opportunities for trade unions to lead and shape the changes that will develop more and better quality public services. UQPS can help to achieve a wider range of secure and meaningful employment.
8. UQPS promises to bring substantial benefits across four dimensions: equity, efficiency, solidarity and sustainability.
9. It should be accompanied by a more generous, less conditional and non-stigmatising system of social security benefits that gives everyone the right to a living income.
10. The case for UQPS belongs to a growing movement for radical change in opposition to today's dominant political consensus that rests on neoliberal economics, social injustice and climate denial.

# Appendix 1:

## Rolling out the UQPS Agenda

Here we consider in more detail how the UQPS approach can be extended beyond services that are often already universal, such as healthcare and education. We focus on childcare, adult social care, housing, transport and access to digital information. There is clearly scope for further development in other areas such as water and energy. None of these cases is exhaustive and each of them could be a report in its own right. In each case we look at why needs should be met through public services and routes to achieving quality and universal access, drawing on practical examples from a range of countries. We consider broad cost implications, and potential benefits from investment in the services.

### CHILD CARE

#### THE CASE FOR UQPS

Education, security in childhood and work are among the generic ‘intermediate needs’ we listed above. Childcare<sup>69</sup> can deliver on all of these: early education, social connection and care for pre-school age children, plus enabling parents to go out to work. It is a shared need that can only be met for all by exercising collective responsibility. Poor children and families have more to gain from it – and are more disadvantaged without it – than those who are better off.<sup>70</sup>

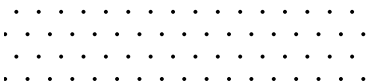
#### ACHIEVING QUALITY AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS.

Many countries have well-developed childcare systems. Some, like New Zealand (between 1999 and 2008) see public spending on childcare as ‘investing in infrastructure, just like building roads’.<sup>71</sup> Norway, an enviable

example, has well-qualified staff, relatively high staff-child ratios, a consistent form of childcare setting (the kindergarten) and continuity of care from age one to six as the norm. It combines ‘a legal guarantee to a place for all children with fees that are both low overall and income-related’. The government covers 85% of childcare costs, caps fees, imposes tight regulations on staff qualifications, limits profit to what is ‘reasonable’ and ensures that parents sit on kindergarten boards.

Factors that contribute to quality in childcare include training and qualifications of staff, ratios of children to staff (lower is generally better), a good mix between children with different social and ethnic backgrounds, suitably warm, consistent relationships between children and staff, parental involvement in managing childcare centres, and opening times to suit parents’ working lives.<sup>72</sup>

In most countries childcare is provided by a mix of for-profit, public and voluntary organisations. Where for-profit provision is combined with a demand-led,



fee-paying system, the observed effects are 'a rise in the fees charged by providers, a drop in standards in poorer areas, and an increase in inequalities of access'.<sup>73</sup> The experience of ABC Learning, the Australia-based conglomerate, is cautionary. Once the largest publicly listed child-care operator in the world, with record profits in 2004-2005, it collapsed and went into administration in 2008.<sup>74</sup>

An exhaustive study of childcare in eight OECD countries (Australia, France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, United States and United Kingdom) concluded that 'free and universal services have much higher enrolment rates than services with a fee' and are the best way of reaching disadvantaged families; where there are fees, even if they are low, they are more likely to deter access than free provision.<sup>75</sup> To make sure children from disadvantaged backgrounds participate, research suggests that 'the most effective strategy is universal access plus outreach to vulnerable groups, not one or the other'.<sup>76</sup>

## POTENTIAL COSTS AND BENEFITS

Total public spending on childcare (including care, pre-school education and related in-kind benefits) as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) ranges from 1.66% in France, 1.45% in Norway and 1.39% in the Netherlands, to 1.13% in the UK, 0.75% in Germany and 0.65% in Australia, leaving the US at the lower end with spending worth 0.55% of GDP.<sup>77</sup>

Spending and quality are inevitably intertwined. In the UK campaigners have argued that in order to achieve high quality care, childcare workers should have training and salaries comparable to primary school staff. They have calculated, accordingly, that free universal provision for children aged six months to the start of compulsory schooling, would produce gross costs

representing 3% of GDP. They also estimate that nine-tenths of the costs would be recouped through employment gains, increased tax revenues and reduced income support payments.<sup>78</sup>

The benefits of quality childcare outweigh the costs. Accessible, affordable, high-quality childcare enables parents – especially women and lone parents – to enter and stay in paid employment. Paid work can be a route to financial independence, especially for women, and lack of childcare often exacerbates gender inequalities in pay and job opportunities. Childcare helps children do better at school and to flourish long after they have left school. Children with experience of preschool education and care are less likely to be unemployed or get in trouble with the law. The OECD has identified a range of social benefits that can be derived from 'high quality early childhood education and care', including better health, reduced likelihood of individuals engaging in risky behaviour and stronger 'civic and social engagement', with positive 'spill-over effects' for society as a whole.<sup>79</sup> Childcare is a preventative measure, helping to avoid various kinds of harm that would otherwise impair people's wellbeing and call for costly interventions by a range of public agencies.

## ADULT SOCIAL CARE

### THE CASE FOR UQPS

Adults who are disabled, frail or vulnerable need care from others. This is essential if they are to maintain their health, autonomy and capacity for social participation. Close relatives often provide the necessary care, but in many cases they cannot do so – either because they lack the skills or resources, or because it impairs their capacity to meet their own needs. On these grounds, secure, good quality adult





social care should be a universal quality public service.

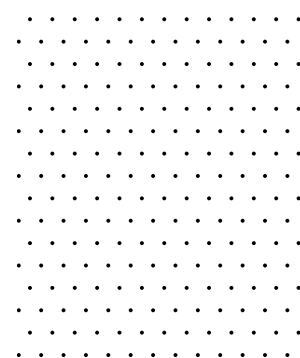
Numbers needing adult social care are growing rapidly. This is usually attributed – uncritically – to the fact that people are living longer, many with multiple chronic conditions that intensify with age. There is an alarming lack of policy focus on what can be done earlier in life to prevent age-related conditions that trigger need for care. There is no shortage of evidence that most long-term conditions are avoidable.<sup>80</sup>

Older people are an asset to society, not just a problem. We must think in terms of a whole system in which care for those who are unable to look after themselves is combined with collective activities that improve and maintain wellbeing across the life cycle. These would include the range of other quality public services as well as specific measures such as access to physical exercise, opportunities to

socialise, a flexible approach to retirement and life-long learning. If prevention were taken seriously and acted upon, there would be no reason to assume that care needs and costs will rise in matching step with population ageing.<sup>81</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to how adult social care can be available for all who need it, regardless of ability to pay.

### **ACHIEVING QUALITY AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS**

There are six crucial factors affecting quality and access. The first, already noted, is the extent to which measures are in place to prevent care needs arising. The second is informal care (the unpaid labour of predominantly family members) and how well it relates to and is valued and supported by formal care systems. The third factor is the paid workforce: their training, qualifications, pay and working conditions. Fourthly,



there is participation by people who need care and their informal carers – how far they are involved in finding solutions to their own care needs, and how far care is designed around the individual concerned (‘personalisation’ in the jargon). Next, there is government regulation – to set and enforce standards of care, and to constrain (or eliminate) profiteering by commercial providers. Finally, there is the overarching factor of political choice, which can make or break all the others: whether to exercise collective responsibility and make adult social care an entitlement for all who need it, or to let the burden fall on individuals and their families.

Services include home-based care, day centres and full-time residential care. In most countries, care services are provided by a mix of public, non-profit and commercial organisations, with for-profit companies rapidly growing their share of the market. Some private firms manage to make large profits, often thanks to government contracts – although in some countries public spending cuts have squeezed the profitability of contracted-out services. Concerns have been raised in the UK about financialisation in the care sector, where private equity firms engage in asset stripping or rush to acquire businesses that seem to promise rich returns, then run up debts that lead to closures.<sup>82</sup>

### COSTS AND BENEFITS

Public spending on long-term care across OECD countries ranges from 4.3% of GDP in the Netherlands and 3.2% in Sweden, to 1.8% in France and 1.2% in the UK, with the US at 0.5%.<sup>83</sup> This reflects different expectations about the balance of formal and informal care, and about how much people should pay out of their own pockets.

Options for paying for care include direct funding through taxation, payment

via a contributory social insurance scheme to which employers and governments may also contribute, private insurance purchased by individuals, or direct payments by individual users which may (or may not) be partly or wholly offset by insurance or cash payments from government. There is usually a distinction between care and accommodation costs and it is common for individuals to have to cover the latter themselves. There is also a distinction between personal and medical care, with the latter more often covered by taxation or social insurance.

The Netherlands was the first to introduce a universal system of long-term care insurance in 1968. Sweden established the right to tax-funded social care in 1982/3. Compulsory long-term care insurance schemes were introduced in Germany in 1995, Japan in 2000, France in 2002 and Korea in 2008.<sup>84</sup> All these have provided at least some support to everyone with needs above a certain level, regardless of ability to pay.

Much can be learned from such schemes and perhaps especially from Germany’s long-term care insurance (LTCI) scheme that features universal social rights within a strong framework for maintaining affordability for all. The overall budget, contribution rates, ceilings, benefit levels and eligibility criteria are all fixed by Federal law. For those in work, employers pay half the premium while the retired pay full contributions, thus helping to address inter-generational equity concerns. LTCI membership is compulsory and non-employed people are covered by employed householder insurance contributions. The scheme acknowledges that long-term care is a social risk requiring social protection and has cross-party political support. After 25 years of operation, despite population ageing, an extension of the scope of LTCI, and increases in benefit levels, it has been possible to keep

contributions within affordable bounds (increased by 0.8% of salaries).<sup>85</sup>

Also in Germany, there are multigenerational houses where care for older people is combined with childcare. These multi-purpose social centres bring under 5s and older people together and have been found to improve the outcomes of both children and of older people. They have also been found to reduce costs to local authorities<sup>86</sup>.

Adult social care is as much part of the 'social infrastructure' as childcare. Good quality care services can improve the wellbeing of elderly and vulnerable people and their carers; they can help some family members who would otherwise be trapped at home to take paid work; they can enrich local communities by enabling more people to participate; they can prevent or delay conditions getting worse and needing more intensive interventions; they can help to reduce demand for costly medical care. They can also provide secure, rewarding paid work for professional carers and others employed in the care sector, with multiplier effects for the economy.<sup>87</sup>

## HOUSING

### THE CASE FOR UQPS

Everyone needs a home that is secure and supports their needs for health, autonomy and social participation. Patterns of ownership, control, quality and cost in housing can exert a powerful influence over the extent of social and economic wellbeing and inequalities in any country. People with low incomes are too often trapped in poor housing (if they are not homeless), while low-quality housing can also trap people in poverty. Homelessness has risen in many countries in recent years.<sup>88</sup> In many parts of the developed world, the cost of renting can exceed 50% of people's monthly salaries

and in parts of the US and the UK in particular, home ownership is out of reach of the vast majority of people, leaving them in insecure housing often in poor condition due to limited state regulation<sup>89</sup>.

Applying the principles of UQPS doesn't mean giving everyone a free dwelling. It does mean making sure there is a home for everyone that is secure, sufficient and affordable. In most countries, no-one except the very rich can afford to buy their home outright and usually the cost of housing is spread over time, through rents or mortgage payments. Rents are most often paid to private or sometimes to 'social' landlords, the latter being government authorities or non-profit associations that operate under public interest obligations. New housing can be funded by government, by for-profit corporations and financial institutions, by non-profit and philanthropic organisations, or by partnerships formed between the various players, where power may or may not be exercised in the public interest. The challenge is to wrestle out of these and other complexities (such as location, land values and planning regimes) a set of arrangements that amount to a universal quality public service providing homes to those who need them.

### ACHIEVING QUALITY AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS

Ensuring that everyone has a secure entitlement to housing that is sufficient and affordable means a lot more than delivering bricks and mortar. Sufficiency includes the quality of the neighbourhood and all its amenities, relationships with neighbours, and how easily residents can find their way to transport, jobs, schools, public services, shops, leisure facilities, and open spaces.

Turkey's Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) aims to build 1million social housing units by 2023<sup>90</sup>. However,

much of this has been linked with the clientelism of an increasingly authoritarian government. Critics have argued that the scheme's top down approach has failed to avoid areas of social deprivation where homes are far from transport links, schools and health centres<sup>91</sup>. This further emphasises the importance of UQPS being democratically controlled and shaped by the people intended to benefit.

Ghettos of deprivation are common in the UK, but elsewhere, municipal authorities such as Vienna, Copenhagen and Singapore have set out to integrate residents from different backgrounds. Neighbourhoods are more likely to thrive where residents have some control over their day-to-day living conditions.<sup>92</sup> This can range from being consulted as part of a residents' association, to being actively engaged and co-producing decisions with housing authorities and independent housing associations, to joining co-operative structures for owning and managing local housing. Housing co-ops flourish in many countries, including Austria, Denmark, Germany, Spain and Switzerland, where they run a considerable chunk of the housing stock.<sup>93</sup> Co-ops are at their best where there is firm and enduring political and practical support from government to ensure transparency and equality of access.

A crucial feature of UQPS in this area is the imperative for housing to be ecologically sustainable. That means not only designing and building zero carbon homes using renewable resources, but also developing neighbourhoods where everyone is encouraged to think and act sustainably. For example, the town of Friburg in South West Germany is claimed to be the 'solar capital of Europe' but that involves 'far more than simple technological conversion'. The Friburg model reportedly promotes 'urban eco-living, facilitated by a strong long-term vision, national policy frameworks and

a focused commitment to change and community engagement.'<sup>94</sup> There are many other developments across the world – although still far too few – that adopt similar approaches to sustainable housing.

None of this can be delivered by markets alone. It requires collective intervention through investment, regulation and subsidy, and strong co-ordination between services.

## COSTS AND BENEFITS

Enormous differences between countries in land and building costs as well as existing stock of socially rented properties make this a hard service to budget for uniformly across countries, but a commitment of 0.5% GDP would certainly have a significant impact in any country. This figure is based on estimates for the UK by the Institute for Global Prosperity (2017), where capital costs are spread through a 10-year bond issue and savings from unneeded future housing benefits are taken into account.<sup>95</sup>

Scarcity drives up prices, so increasing supply is an early goal wherever there are housing shortages – a common experience in cities across the world. Building more dwellings can increase supply, but it may be equally important to refurbish and redistribute existing stock, using regulation, taxation or compulsory purchase to discourage or eliminate empty dwellings and multiple home ownership.<sup>96</sup>

Markets are unlikely to produce sufficient and affordable housing unless they are shaped and managed by local and national government, using regulation, public investment and partnerships between commercial, state and other non-profit bodies. Public Asset Corporations in Copenhagen and Hamburg, and Montpellier's Special Purpose Vehicles for pooling and developing land are examples.



The cost of supplying more homes can be kept in check by investing public funds in infrastructure, land acquisition, building and retro-fitting, by legislating to prevent speculation on land and property values, and by limiting profits extracted by private developers. In Vienna the city government has kept housing affordable by owning most of the land, using municipal developments and supply-side subsidies to keep costs down. Denmark levies a tax on land, based on one-thousandth of the market value of the land, reviewed every two years, which is collected nationally and distributed to local government for reinvestment in housing and infrastructure. In England and Wales, a growing network of Community Land Trusts, set up by local people, develop and manage affordable housing and other local assets. There are countless initiatives in cities across Europe that aim in these and other ways to boost the supply of affordable housing.<sup>97</sup>

Poorer households generally pay a much larger slice of their income in rents or mortgages and even the least expensive homes are beyond the means of some.<sup>98</sup> So further measures are needed if quality housing is to be genuinely accessible for all. These may take the form of demand-side benefits, such as housing benefit in the UK (widely considered a way of enriching landlords as the payment is entirely to them, or subsidising employers who pay poverty wages) or supply side measures, whereby prices, including rents and purchase deposits, are capped or subsidised, as is common in parts of Austria, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.

Investment in housing as a universal service will yield substantial dividends, provided that a good balance is achieved between quantity, quality, sufficiency and affordability. Secure, sufficient housing is a route to meeting basic needs for health, autonomy and social participation across the lifetime.

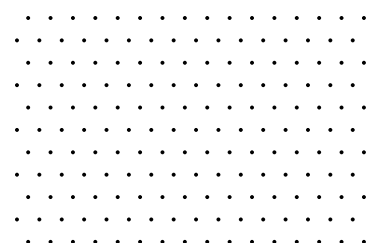
Conversely, homelessness or inadequate housing will act as a barrier and trigger demand for costly interventions in areas such as healthcare, income support and criminal justice.<sup>99</sup> Where housing is designed and managed to maximise ecological sustainability, it will help to safeguard natural resources and the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs.

## TRANSPORT

### THE CASE FOR UQPS

There is now a growing consensus that access to motorised transport is essential for meeting basic human needs and attaining a reasonable standard of living.<sup>100</sup> It enables you to reach healthcare and other services, find and keep paid employment, meet family and friends, and generally participate in society.

But there are wide variations in how far motorised transport is actually available, and to whom. People living in rural areas often have to travel distances that are unsuitable for walking or cycling. Public transport is more likely to be patchy and unreliable outside towns and cities. People on low incomes spend a far greater proportion of their income on transport than those who are better off. They depend much more on public transport, and are affected more negatively if they cannot get access to it or find it unaffordable. So if motorised transport has become one of life's essentials, it follows that it should be available to all who need it, regardless of ability to pay. Equally, where public transport is run by private providers without any state oversight at all, people in the lowest income brackets end up being the least well served and the cost to service users increases dramatically.<sup>101</sup>



## ACHIEVING QUALITY AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS

Free bus travel would go a long way towards meeting this goal. What's required is a well regulated, inter-connected, frequent, reliable and adequately funded scheme that also discourages car use and encourages safe walking and cycling alongside public transport.

There are free local transport schemes (mainly buses) in more than 100 towns and cities worldwide, including more than 30 in the USA and 20 in France, as well as in Poland, Sweden, Italy, Slovenia, Estonia, Australia and elsewhere. Some are restricted to certain social groups and times of day. They have been adopted for a range of reasons – to reduce social and economic inequalities, encourage social participation, discourage private car use, cut levels of air pollution and eliminate administrative costs associated with ticketing.

Most European countries have regulated bus services with co-ordinated routes and timetables, as well as decent links between town and country, and adequate levels of public subsidy. In the UK, by contrast, services are largely privatised and poorly regulated. Only in London, where a strategic authority has kept control of public transport, has bus travel increased in volume and improved in quality.

## COST AND BENEFITS

A budget of 0.4% GDP for enhanced transport represents a reasonable estimate for additional spending required to provide universal access to local transport to reach employment and the other public services. A huge variety of taxes are levied by local authorities around the world to pay for their public transport systems, ranging from local income and property taxes, to sales and tourism taxes, corporation tax and

road user charges.<sup>102</sup> For example, the French pay for public transport through a payroll levy called *Versement Transport* (VT). More than 80% of France's urban transport authorities apply the levy, which pays for more than half of their infrastructure investment and subsidies to operators.

Spending money on buses is likely to yield a range of social, economic and environmental benefits. In South Africa where transport is mainly road based, most transport mirrors the divides of the apartheid era. This has led to a rise of large-scale social movements calling for an effective public bus system<sup>103</sup>. A 2016 evaluation of free bus travel for older and disabled people in England found that pass holders found it easier to access to services, had more opportunities for social interaction and were left with more disposable income; all this disproportionately benefited poorer people.<sup>104</sup> Other UK studies have found that free bus travel leads to better health as a result of more physical activity (because bus travellers walk longer distances than people travelling by car), easier access to jobs, increased independence, reduced isolation, a greater sense of belonging to one's local area, and contributing more to society.<sup>105</sup>

Accessible, co-ordinated public transport across a large conurbation, even without free fares, has been estimated to reduce car traffic by 9%, resulting in better air quality and lower carbon emissions.<sup>106</sup> If car use were cut further by introducing free bus fares, the effect could be considerably enhanced. Greenhouse gas emissions from use of cars and taxis are more than seven times higher than from use of buses.<sup>107</sup>

## INFORMATION

Digital information and communications technology (ICT) is increasingly

taken for granted as one of life's essentials. Smartphones and laptops are now considered a necessary element of household expenditure and included in the agreed 'minimum income standard' for the UK.<sup>108</sup> The United Nations recognises that the Internet is 'a driving force in accelerating progress towards ... achieving the Sustainable Development Goals'.<sup>109</sup>

Going online enables people to participate in society, to learn, to find work, to connect with family and friends, and to gain access to public services. Indeed, it is likely that implementing UQPS will soon depend on ICT. In Kenya, mobile banking has led to increased financial inclusion with access to mobile phone data enabling people to transfer money and access financial services. This connects individuals to other individuals and providers while overcoming geographical barriers<sup>110</sup>.

A 2015 report for the World Economic Forum observed that half of the world's population did not have mobile phones and 450 million people still lived out of reach of a mobile signal.<sup>111</sup> 'Digital poverty' remains widespread between and within countries. In Iceland, Norway and the Netherlands, more than 95% of households have access to the internet, but in Mexico, Costa Rica and Columbia, between a third and a half of households do not.<sup>112</sup>

## ACHIEVING QUALITY AND UNIVERSAL ACCESS

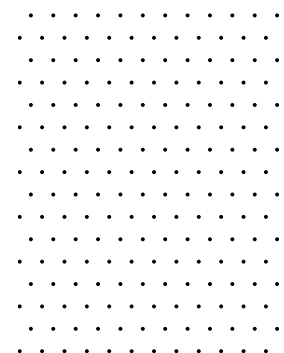
Persistent inequalities in access to ICT have been attributed to the fact that governments have allowed market failure 'by promoting the free market rationale and using competition as the instrument for improving digital connectivity, instead of defining new technologies as utilities'.<sup>113</sup> ICT should be treated not simply as a commodity for sale at market prices, but as a public good or utility that is accessible, sufficient and affordable for all, as a matter

of right. In other words, it should be a universal basic service. In China, where broadband infrastructure development has been largely state led, broadband penetration has exceeded 50%, far outstripping the average level of comparable countries<sup>114</sup>.

Access depends on two main factors: a signal with sufficient capacity (speed, volume and reliability) to communicate information, and a device for using the signal to communicate. A decade ago, Internet access was primarily associated with landlines on the old telephone networks. Today it is increasingly wireless, through mobile phone networks, which became the majority vehicle of worldwide traffic in 2016<sup>115</sup>. So while implementing an Information UQPS is likely to involve some mix of mediums and technologies depending on specific geographies, in the main it will be about providing sufficient access to wireless networks.

In most countries the mobile networks are managed by regulated enterprises with varying degrees of competition and regulatory obligations for public interest.<sup>116</sup> Generally the airspace through which the signals are transmitted is acknowledged as a public asset, and so providers bid at auctions for the rights to use certain spectrums of frequencies for their transmissions, which they then lease under conditions set by the authorities. Regulatory and legal structures can provide leverage to ensure universal access and to keep costs for the basic service to a minimum.

A major concern about ICT is the growing might of a handful of global corporations and their power over governments as well as individuals. So a key component of a UQPS approach in this area is to value and support the many hundreds of thousands of locally generated initiatives in towns, cities and neighbourhoods across the world, whose purpose it is to keep that power at bay. They work to extend internet



access by improving the speed and reach of signals, by making public spaces available (such as libraries and cafes), by sharing devices, by enabling communications within neighbourhoods through customised local platforms, by offering training in digital skills and by lobbying governments.<sup>117</sup>

Some work in partnership with public and/or commercial organisations; others operate independently. Guifinet in Barcelona describes itself as ‘a bottom-up, citizenship-driven technological, social and economic project with the objective of creating a free, open and neutral telecommunications network based on a commons model’.<sup>118</sup> The Magnolia Road Internet Cooperative specialises in bringing high-speed Internet to mountain communities in Colorado, prioritising ‘the customer over profit’.<sup>119</sup> ‘Platform cooperatives’ are a growing phenomenon, formed by nurses, delivery drivers, musicians, care providers, photographers and many others to challenge the dominance of tech giants such as Amazon and Uber by democratising and taking back control of the Internet.<sup>120</sup> But to call any of these typical would do no justice to their infinite variety in size, form and working practices. They not only help to make ICT accessible and affordable, but also – crucially – they can enable people to control and shape the way they use the internet.

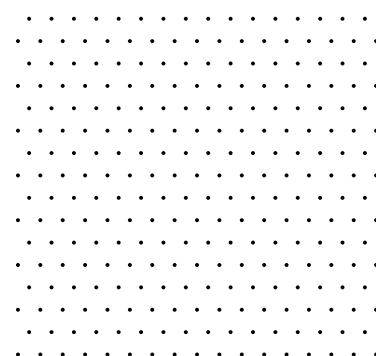
## COSTS AND BENEFITS

It has been estimated that around 0.6% of GDP could cover both service access and devices in a typical OECD country, although alternatives such as public WiFi could significantly reduce the per person costs in some areas.

However, services and devices are useless without the skills to use them. A significant part of digital exclusion is the result of a lack of skills. For example, a 2018 survey UK found that 11.3 million people lacked basic digital skills,

with age, gender and low income as the main predictors of low skills.<sup>121</sup> It is a job for education (as a universal quality public service) to make digital skills more universal. This calls for reform of the primary and secondary school curricula, as well as adequate resources to ensure that schools can deliver. Adult education services will play a key role in upgrading skills in step with evolving technology.

Access to digital information and communications as a UQPS is an important vehicle for meeting everyday needs. It will reduce inequalities that currently arise from digital exclusion. It can help people stay in touch without having to travel. For the economy, it can help business development at all levels. A 15-year study of 35 OECD countries found a strong positive relationship between broadband investment and economic growth through information exchange, new services and telework, which together helped to increase GDP by an average of 0.38% annually.<sup>122</sup>





## Appendix 2:

# Considering UQPS Alongside Universal Basic Income

**A**s we have noted, UQPS should be combined with a more generous, less conditional and non-stigmatising system of social security benefits that gives everyone the right to a living income. What matters is the level at which the budget for cash payments begins to divert funds that could otherwise be spent on improving and extending services.

While it is argued that public funds can be increased substantially, it remains highly unlikely that unconditional cash payments at anything other than a negligible rate could be afforded alongside a robust programme to implement UQPS.

Cash distribution is not about exercising collective responsibility to meet shared needs, but about making payments to individuals to help them to buy what they need (or want). It draws on market ideology to address problems such as poverty, precarious employment and inequality, which have emerged from free market practices. More progressive advocates of UBI say cash payments should be underpinned by a strong framework of public services, but we can find no explanation of how both could be sufficient and affordable at the same time – let alone how sufficient payments could be funded alongside an ambitious programme to improve and extend the social wage.

So it is worth reflecting briefly on how cash payments compare with UBS across the four dimensions of equity, efficiency, solidarity and sustainability.

### EQUALITY

If you give cash payments to people who have little or nothing, it is bound to make at least a small improvement in their lives. But cash payments on their own cannot reduce inequalities. As the ILO observes, they can never amount to ‘a stand-alone solution to redress an ever more unequal primary distribution of incomes’. People need power and access to a range of social and material resources that any affordable cash payment scheme would be unlikely to enable them to buy. Without a coherent policy framework that takes these broader factors into account, says the ILO, ‘a UBI may exacerbate inequality’.<sup>123</sup> There is simply no conceivable scenario where funding a sufficient basic income scheme would be compatible with funding the full range of public provision needed to achieve social justice rather than minimal poverty relief. If the balance of investment in any country were to swing away from services towards cash payments, the value of the social wage would fall, hitting the poor hardest.

### EFFICIENCY

If a basic income scheme replaced all mean-tested benefits, it could arguably simplify and reduce the administrative costs of income support. But, as most BI protagonists admit, it would need to be topped up by some conditional payments – for example, for people with physical or mental disabilities. At the same time, the tax system would have

to be overhauled to claw back part or all of the payments for people on higher incomes. One critic, envisaging a small and affordable UBI, describes a ‘powerful new tax engine [that] will pull along a tiny cart’.<sup>124</sup> Certainly, cash transfers should not be increased without a proper assessment of whether the same goals could be achieved more effectively through public services.

If, at the extreme, a basic income scheme were to replace public services as well as income support, people would be left to buy themselves out of any trouble that happened to befall them. As we have noted, market-based systems are less efficient than collective services for meeting many of our shared needs, because of higher transaction costs, greater risk of moral hazard and the pursuit of profit. Efforts to generate value through a BI scheme and return it to the source of input (the people who receive and spend the cash payments) will very likely be outweighed by extractive practices in the market place.

## SOLIDARITY

Across employment and social security policies, the state has a role in guaranteeing the protection of a minimum income, but beyond this, giving money to individuals to spend as they wish does nothing to bring them together or build a sense of common purpose. On the contrary, it plugs them into a market system that feeds on choice and competition. It erodes the relational base of services and the ethos of shared interest and collective responsibility. In the words of Francine Mestrum, the radical Belgian writer and analyst, basic income is an individualist solution to a set of shared problems: ‘progressives will look for other solutions, based on solidarity, reciprocity and collective action’.<sup>125</sup>

## SUSTAINABILITY

Ed Whitfield, founder of the US-based Fund for Democratic Communities, argues that a guaranteed basic income would ‘only help people have more access to consumption without altering anything about how production is organised.’<sup>126</sup> Such a scheme can do nothing to change patterns of consumption, to encourage more sustainable use of resources, or to create the conditions for collective approaches to climate mitigation at local or national levels. Minimum income protection is important, but cash payments have little to offer that is strategically preventative over time, nothing to build the ‘capacity for continuance’ in social, economic or environmental terms.

In summary, while more sufficiency and less conditionality, as well as more powerful trades unions and other measures to boost people’s power in the work place are critical in creating minimum income protection, we don’t see UQPS as a natural policy companion to a ‘universal basic income’ scheme of ‘sufficient’ cash payments to all. This is because the two conflict ideologically and could not both be affordable and sufficient at the same time. In terms of equity, efficiency, solidarity and sustainability, there is a strong case for giving priority to UBS and seeking more compatible ways of reforming social security systems.<sup>127</sup>

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## Full Report:

### UNIVERSAL QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES

#### A policy briefing for trade unions

By Anna Coote and Edanur Yazici

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