



Kent Academic Repository

**Heins, Elke and Chung, Heejung (2021) *Time for a new Beveridge Report?*
. Social Policy Association internet blog.**

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/87686/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<http://www.social-policy.org.uk/spa-blog/time-for-a-new-beveridge-report/>

This document version

Publisher pdf

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

HOME > NEWS > Time for a new Beveridge Report?

Time for a new Beveridge Report?

BY ELKE HEINS AND HEEJUNG CHUNG

🕒 March 25, 2021 👤 S-P-A-Administrator 📁 News, SPA Blog 💬 Comments Off



Privacy & Cookies: This site uses cookies. By continuing to use this website, you agree to their use. To find out more, including how to control cookies, see here: [Cookie Policy](#).

Close and accept

It has been 80 years since William Beveridge was commissioned to report on the ways that Britain should be rebuilt after the Second World War. As is well known, the resulting government White Paper '**Social Insurance and Allied Services**' published in 1942 became the blueprint for social policy in post-war Britain. The report was clearly a child of its time as expressed in the gender divisions that underpinned many policy recommendations such as (male) full employment and family allowances (for 'dependent' women and children in heterosexual coupled families) and thus soon became out of step with societal developments in the decades after the war. Furthermore, whilst not explicit, the report did not consider the barriers to good employment that people of colour would have experienced.

Another weakness was that the flat-rate character of benefits did not manage to protect recipients from poverty. Furthermore, the stronger than anticipated means-tested character of the benefit system meant it was not sufficient to meet the welfare demands of the middle class, resulting in the **stigmatisation of welfare recipients**. Despite these shortcomings, the Beveridge Report formed the basis for the introduction of the NHS and national insurance and assistance schemes after the war and had a **major influence** on other countries, too.

When referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, the **war metaphor** has been frequently invoked by political leaders. Just recently a government advisor called for a Royal Commission type report '**to work out how not to leave the badly wounded behind**'. While we fortunately are not in the middle of a real war, the current crisis caused by the pandemic unequivocally shows the many failings of the UK social security system and flawed economic growth model as highlighted, for example, by the sharp increase in **poverty and insecurity**. In the light of the ambition to '**build back better**' calls for a new Beveridge Report beg two questions: who should be involved in designing a new blueprint and what should the country's future welfare state look like ?

Who should be involved in developing a new welfare state blueprint?

It's time for a new Beveridge Report. However, this should not be created by a small group of government advisers or civil servants as was the case for the inter-departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services in 1941 that Beveridge chaired. Instead, we need to ensure that any Commission is representative of the country as a whole and takes a wide range of expertise into account to work out an evidence-based and widely shared vision for the welfare state of the future. Promising examples of participatory democracy are plentiful and we don't need to look far for experiences with this **new style of policy designing** – Scotland recently completed its first **Citizens' Assembly** to help formulate new policies for the country and the **Commission on Social Security** is explicitly led by experts of experience. We need to incorporate **a more bottom-up approach** in understanding what people want, and what they are willing to risk, pool or possibly sacrifice when building a future welfare state.

When we facilitate such discussions, we need to ensure the representation of diverse voices. The white-male-breadwinner-female caregiver model is insufficient to account for the different needs and demands

Privacy & Cookies: This site uses cookies. By continuing to use this website, you agree to their use.

To find out more, including how to control cookies, see here: [Cookie Policy](#).

Close and accept

than being afterthoughts. Ensuring that the new report encompasses diverse voices including those of

other groups of protected characteristics, such as disabled and LGBT+ communities will ensure the development of policies that address diverse and complex needs that can benefit everyone.

What would a 'new Beveridge Report' need to consider?

The main problems with the existing social security system include its heavily means-tested and in general 'mean' character. It stigmatises welfare recipients and has created a perceived distinction between 'them and us', as eloquently demonstrated in the excellent book **Good Times, Bad Times** by the late John Hills. Another challenge is the precarious labour market characterised by high income inequality, the prevalence of poverty wages despite campaigns for a national living wage, and little employment security in general including zero hours contracts. While these problems existed before the pandemic, the lack of adequate social protection frustrated attempts to bring the virus down and the widespread insecurity caused by the economic impacts of the lockdowns made many more people realise their own vulnerability and question the existent welfare and labour market model.

Surveys reveal that the majority of the UK population regard the **income distribution as unfair** and would actually like to see **a more progressive welfare state**, although there are notable differences by policy area. Support for the unemployed is a case in point with consistently low levels of approval from the public. Interestingly, the **latest British Social Attitudes Survey** revealed a discernible increase in support for spending on social security, but this policy area is still not a high priority for most people. Nevertheless, it would be a missed policy opportunity if we were to focus only on those in destitution due to the fact that a successful welfare state needs to encompass the middle classes to avoid the distinction between 'them and us' that would undermine any proper collective effort. Despite its limitations, the Job Retention scheme has provided the UK with a glimpse of what a proper unemployment benefit scheme could look like, and demonstrated both the need and support for such policies.

It is critical that a new Beveridge-style report incorporates the growing need for better levels of care, both childcare and social care. One key reason why the UK has fared so badly during the COVID-19 crisis was due to **what happened in our social care system** as a consequence of harsh austerity measures over the past decade. We also have seen how essential good quality childcare is to ensure a well-functioning economy and society, yet many providers are **on the brink of collapse**, again largely due to funding cuts.

The unequal distribution of money, but also time need to be considered. The pandemic has provided us with an opportunity to rethink values and priorities in terms of work, family, and leisure. A large number of **reports now** indicate that workers would rather be given **more time** than more money – **for family**, for their well-being, and other important pursuits in life. The lack of such work-life balance has detrimental outcomes for workers' mental health **which is costly** for the economy and society. We also know that time poverty is key in understanding bad **health choices, environmental choices**, and other long-term challenges. Related to this, we need to look into the future sustainability of welfare and employment. We need to shift away from a low-skill, low-pay growth model. This includes a 'Green Deal', support for skills

Privacy & Cookies: This site uses cookies. By continuing to use this website, you agree to their use.
To find out more, including how to control cookies, see here: [Cookie Policy](#).

Close and accept

our society better to future proof against risks ahead of us and incorporate the diverse needs and

demands of citizens. We should not go back to our old ways in haste but take a moment to reflect collectively how we want our welfare states to look like in future.

Elke Heins is Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at the University of Edinburgh. [@socpolEdinburgh](#)

Heejung Chung is Reader in Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Kent. [@HeejungChung](#)

Both authors are involved in the SPA's new Employment and Social Security Policy Group.

Disclaimer: Blogs published on this website express the views of the author(s), and not of the SPA.



« **PREVIOUS**

SPA Statement on Care and Collegiality during the Covid pandemic

NEXT »

Building new foundations for the wobbly pillar of the welfare state



[SPA Privacy Statement \(PDF\)](#)

[SPA Statement of Ethics \(PDF\)](#)

Email: admin@social-policy.org.uk

Twitter: [@SocialPolicyUK](#)

Address: 10 Queen Street Place,
London, EC4R 1BE

Registered charity no:
528347

Copyright: The Social Policy Association

This site uses cookies [More info](#)

[No problem](#)

Privacy & Cookies: This site uses cookies. By continuing to use this website, you agree to their use. To find out more, including how to control cookies, see here: [Cookie Policy](#).

[Close and accept](#)