

Innovative and ambitious or unrealistic and risky? Initial professional perspectives on the basic income for care leavers in Wales pilot

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Abstract

The Welsh Government's Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot has been subject to public and political debate. While proponents applaud the ambitious nature of the policy and its intent to strengthen support for young people leaving care, critics have raised concern about its design and questioned its potential for positive impact. This article contributes to the debate by detailing the views and early experiences of professionals with direct responsibility for implementing the policy and supporting recipients. Online focus groups were conducted with forty-one professionals of varying seniority. Analysis of the data revealed a range of different and often contrasting perspectives. This included differences of opinion between participants, as well as individuals feeling personally conflicted. Whilst participants recognized the potential of the basic income pilot to reduce disadvantage and bolster young people's future

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prospects, they were simultaneously concerned about differences in the needs, circumstances and characteristics of young people leaving care and the risk of harm for those considered vulnerable. The mixed views are considered in relation to the policy and practice context, whereby professionals have responsibilities as 'corporate parents' and devolution has resulted in partial rather than full transfer of powers from the central UK Government.

Keywords: care leavers; cash transfer schemes; state care; transitions to adulthood; basic income; social policy.

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Introduction

In 2022, the Welsh Government announced the Basic Income for Care Leavers in Wales pilot. With an initial budget of £20 million, the pilot aims to reduce disadvantage and strengthen support for young people during their transition to adulthood ([Welsh Government 2022a](#)). Despite these aspirations, basic income schemes are controversial ([Davies 2019](#)), and the pilot has divided opinion ([Masters 2022](#); [Thomas 2022](#); [BBC 2023a](#); [Welsh Parliament 2023](#); [Lister 2024](#)).

This article explores the perspectives of the professionals who are responsible for supporting young people leaving care. Undertaken during the early stages of the pilot and as part of a Welsh Government-commissioned evaluation of the scheme, forty-one professionals involved in operationalizing and delivering the policy were asked about their views of the basic income pilot and early observations of recipients.

The following section summarizes literature related to the target recipients of the basic income pilot, young people leaving care, and summarizes policy efforts designed to support their transitions. Details of the Welsh pilot are provided before details of the study are outlined.

Transitions made harder through disadvantage

Transitions to adulthood for young people leaving care have been described as 'accelerated' and 'compressed' ([Stein 2019](#): 400) with young people having to adapt to the responsibilities associated with adulthood at an earlier age and more abruptly than their peers in the general population ([Palmer, Norris, and Kelleher 2022](#)). Frequently lacking the support available to their counterparts, young people leaving care face 'multidimensional precarity' ([Bečević and Höjer 2025](#): 11) with changes related to education, training and employment, finances, formal and informal relationships, accommodation, and independence ([Stein and](#)

Munro 2008). Compounding their disadvantage, it has been asserted that young people face a support ‘cliff edge’, where access to social and financial assistance is diminished and time-limited (Cameron et al., 2018: 163). While some young people show remarkable resilience and experience positive transitions, concerns regarding poor outcomes are long-standing and prevalent across diverse contexts (Refaeli et al., 2023). Recent evidence from the UK shows disparities in respect of educational attainment and employment (Harrison et al., 2023), health and well-being (Murray et al., 2020; Sacker et al., 2021) and parenting (Parsons and Schoon 2021).

In recognition of the disadvantaged position of young people leaving care, there have been sustained political efforts to strengthen support in Wales and other UK nations, and statutory provisions can be considered well-developed by international standards (Strahl et al., 2021). The concept of ‘corporate parenting’ underpins the provision of support and is defined as the ‘collective responsibility of all those within local authorities (LAs) to safeguard and promote the life chances of looked after children’ (Welsh Government 2020: 4). Legislation requires the allocation of a Personal Adviser and the production of a Pathway Plan, designed to ensure holistic consideration of needs and an identified source of professional support (Welsh Government 2018). Such support remains available up to 21 or 25 for those in education or training (Welsh Government 2018).

Despite these provisions, reports have raised concerns about the adequacy and consistency of support (Care Inspectorate Wales 2019; Welsh Parliament 2023), and these can be related to long-standing questions about the state’s ability to meaningfully substitute the care and support typically provided by birth families (Bullock et al., 2006; Neagu 2021). As part of its pledge to ‘celebrate diversity and move to eliminate inequality in all of its forms’, the Welsh Government committed to a basic income pilot for young people leaving care (Welsh Government 2021: 6). To date, as will be discussed in the following section, supporting evidence for the likely effectiveness of this intervention is limited.

The basic income for care leavers in Wales pilot

As of 31 July 2024, the Welsh basic income pilot included over 600 care leavers, each of whom was entitled to receive £1,600 (£1,280 after tax) per month for up to two years on an unconditional basis (Welsh Government 2024). Eligibility for the scheme was based on legislative definitions of care leavers entitled to statutory support under the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 (Welsh Government 2018), but restricted to those turning eighteen years of age between the 1 July 2022 and 30 June 2023 (see Welsh Government 2023). Recipients were

offered additional financial advice as part of the pilot and retained their existing rights and entitlements as care leavers ([Welsh Government 2022a](#)).

The pilot in Wales is reflective of burgeoning international interest in basic income schemes, with perceptions having progressed from a ‘fringe idea’ ([Howard et al., 2025: 2](#)) to an ‘unmissable policy option’ ([Gonzalez and Bidadanure 2020: 2](#)). The number of basic income schemes has risen sharply since the Covid-19 pandemic and the idea is increasingly prominent in public policy discourse ([Chrisp et al., 2022](#)). Whilst basic income policies vary, including by name, aims and objectives, design, and implementation ([Gonzalez and Bidadanure 2020](#)), evidence generally suggests benefits in health, well-being, and mental health ([Okantey 2023](#)).

Whilst promising, only two other schemes have targeted care leavers. At the time of writing, a trial of a cash transfer scheme (consisting of a one-off payment of £2,000) for 18–25-year-olds was on-going in England ([Sanders and Vallis 2023](#)) with evaluation data yet to be published. In the USA, the Santa Clara Youth Transitioning from Foster Care Study included seventy-two recipients aged 24 who received \$1,000 for 24 months. Before and after measures with the participant group suggested that wellbeing, income stability, housing, employment, and health had improved, though it is not clear how this can be attributed to the basic income ([County of Santa Clara 2023](#)).

In addition to underdeveloped evidence about the potential impact of basic income for care leavers, the policy landscape of devolved powers in the UK presented further complexity to the pilot’s development. Since 1997, devolution has resulted in the transfer of some, but not all, powers from the central UK Government to administrations in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland ([Prabhakar 2024](#)). For example, devolved powers in Wales extend to health and social care, but not to social security or justice ([MacKinnon 2015](#)).

Policy and law-making by successive Labour-led administrations in Wales has been described as distinctive from that of central government and underpinned by ‘socialist and civic nationalist principles that are collectivist, interventionist and Welsh-focused’ ([Chaney 2022: 166](#)). Ideological differences have been noted with Conservative-led Westminster Governments between 2010 and 2024 (which included the period during which the Welsh basic income pilot was designed and implemented) who have argued the need for fiscal restraint and ensuring sustainable spending ([MacKinnon 2015; Hobson 2020](#)). Such differences have been apparent in respect of the basic income pilot, with the Westminster Government critical of the Welsh scheme ([BBC 2023b](#)). Whilst delivery of the pilot was possible under the Welsh Government’s legislative competence, its framing as ‘in addition to’ rather than ‘instead of’ existing care leaver support, could only be guaranteed for devolved state support. The pilot’s interaction with non-devolved state provision

was more complex. A key example of this was when a request by Welsh Government for the basic income payments to be disregarded in means assessments for legal aid was denied ([Ministry of Justice 2023](#)).

In summary, the provision of a basic income pilot for care leavers has proved contentious. Whilst described as ‘bold and ambitious’ ([Welsh Parliament 2023](#): 133), the pilot is politically complex and its potential to improve transitions for young people leaving care is uncertain. The Welsh Government has commissioned a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot, of which some early findings are reported in this article. This article will consider the scheme from the perspective of professionals tasked with operationalizing the policy and supporting young people in receipt of the money. This support is a crucial part of the young people’s overall leaving care package, and their journey of engaging with the pilot. However, there is a dearth of research in basic income literature on the role and perceptions of social workers and citizen-facing bureaucrats in shaping narratives and experiences of basic income recipients. The early perspectives of professionals, with direct experiences of the scheme, offer informed insights about the pilot and its potential to improve experiences and outcomes for young people leaving care.

This article outlines our analysis in respect of the following research question:

How do professionals perceive the basic income pilot and its potential to strengthen transitions to adulthood for young people leaving care?

Methods

The Children’s Social Care Research and Development Centre has been commissioned by the Welsh Government to undertake an evaluation of the pilot, in collaboration with academics from four other universities. A study protocol, which outlines the structure and design of the evaluation has been published ([Westlake et al., 2024](#)). A group of young people with care experience provides ongoing advice to the study team (further details of the group’s activities can be found in [Mathur et al., 2025](#)). Ethical approval was granted by Cardiff University’s Research Ethics Committee.

Stakeholder attitudes and experiences are the focus of the analysis in this article, and data are drawn from a series of focus groups and one interview conducted predominantly in the spring of 2023 (approximately 8–10 months after the pilot started when enrolment was on-going).

The first in a series of annual evaluation reports has been published by Welsh Government, which includes data from this phase of the study ([Holland et al., 2024](#)). This article adds new data and further analysis through consideration of the policy and legislative context in Wales.

Professionals of varying seniority and from across Wales were invited to take part in a focus group (see [Table 1](#)). Twenty of the twenty-two LAs in Wales were represented by the forty-one participants.

Participants consisted of three key groups:

- Personal Advisors with experience of working directly with young people and supporting their transition from care.
- Team Managers overseeing the work of Personal Advisors within LAs.
- Heads of Children’s Services and senior managers with leadership and oversight responsibilities for the delivery of the pilot.

Prospective participants were contacted via email and provided with information about the study. All contacts were informed that participation was voluntary and not a requirement of their employment.

Focus group sessions were online and participants were offered a choice of dates and times. One participant was interviewed separately as they were unable to attend any of the scheduled focus groups. Verbal consent was recorded at the start of the session.

Each focus group was facilitated by two members of the evaluation team. Interview schedules were structured around three topic areas; pilot design, delivery, and roll-out, and early observations. Sessions began with participants being asked to share ‘three words’ to describe the basic income pilot. This was designed both as a warm-up exercise and to elicit principal thoughts of the scheme which informed the more detailed discussions.

With participants’ permission, focus group sessions were recorded and fully transcribed. Data were analysed using NVivo software, with both an inductive and deductive approach ([Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006](#)), sometimes referred to as a ‘retroductive’ approach ([Meyer and Lunnay 2013](#)). One member of the research team coded the transcripts and identified themes and sub-themes (examples included independence, vulnerabilities, and conditionality). Subsequent refinement and iteration were supported by members of the wider team. Participants’ responses

Table 1. Summary of participants and data collection.

Participant role	Participation format and number	Participant number
Head of Service or senior manager (HoS)	3 focus groups	12
Team Manager (TM)	2 focus groups	7
Personal Advisor (PA)	4 focus groups (plus one individual interview)	22
Total	9 focus groups, 1 interview	41

were also considered in relation to the overarching evaluation questions and developing programme theory (Holland et al., 2024). Further informing the analysis, the findings were discussed with two advisory groups, one comprises care-experienced young people and another of multi-disciplinary professionals with expertise in a range of areas.

The creation of a word cloud further assisted our analysis. Generated using NVivo, it incorporated the three words shared by participants to describe the basic income pilot. This provided a visual which gave the research team an initial understanding of the data. The presentation displayed dominant and recurrent descriptors but also maintained the breadth and scope of participants' responses (McNaught and Lam 2010). The word cloud allowed a means of cross-checking to further interrogate and critically review our interpretations.

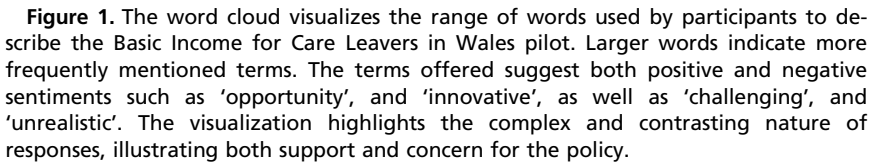
In generating the word cloud, slight modifications to words were made in two instances, which involved combining 'opportunities' with 'opportunity' and 'confusion' with 'confusing'. In instances where participants used a phrase (such as 'unaccompanied asylum seekers') instead of three separate words, these were inputted as a single word to retain meaning (e.g. unaccompaniedasylumseekers).

Findings

This section presents the word cloud followed by an overview of key themes from the in-depth discussions. The data suggest a range of different and often contrasting perspectives. This includes variety across different perspectives, as well as individuals sometimes being personally conflicted. While participants recognize the potential of the basic income pilot to reduce disadvantage and to bolster current and future prospects, they are simultaneously concerned about inequities within the cohort and the risk of harm. In addition, judgements about spending decisions were discernible within the data.

Word cloud

Figure 1 showcases the range of descriptors participants gave in relation to the basic income pilot. The frequency of suggestions ranged from 8 ('opportunity') to 1 (such as 'risky'). The results can be broadly categorized into three groups: summary views of the pilot design, delivery and roll-out, and early observations. Delivery and roll-out relates to the operationalization of the pilot across Wales and communication around this time between policy and practice leads. Discussion of this partnership working is beyond the scope of this article and further details are available in (Mathur et al., 2025). That said, it is necessary to note that



Summary views of the pilot included a range of favourable terms, several of which implied a sense of optimism and hope. For example, the most dominant term offered was **'opportunity'**. Participants similarly described the policy as **'inspiring'**, **'innovative'**, and **'exciting'** and the approach as **'empowering'** and **'outcome focused'**.

Criticisms and concerns were also apparent, including those of both principled and practical nature. For example, the word cloud included

the words ‘**unrealistic**’ and ‘**idealistic**’. Reference to ‘**exit**’ reflected the time-limited nature of the pilot, and professional anxiety is suggested in descriptions of it being ‘**not thought through**’, ‘**worrying**’, and ‘**scary**’.

The word cloud also provides insight into participants’ early observations of recipients and the pilot. Contrasts are apparent as descriptors note both the potential to ‘**facilitate communication**’, as well as initiate ‘**disengagement**’. Likewise, ‘**financial stability**’ is noted but the pilot is also described as ‘**unbalanced**’, with descriptors highlighting implications for young people related to living arrangements (‘**rent**’, ‘**accommodation**’, and ‘**housing benefit**’) and status (‘**unaccompanied asylum seekers**’ ‘**vulnerable**’).

The word cloud foregrounds mixed and contrasting perceptions which were expanded on in the focus group discussions. These are outlined in the following section. Participants are distinguished by role (Team Manager—TM, Head of Service—HoS, Personal Advisor—PA) and LA (1–20).

Reducing disadvantage and bolstering futures

Consistent with the positive descriptors of the basic income pilot in the previous section, participants acknowledged the disadvantaged position of young people leaving care and supported the policy intention of reducing disadvantage and strengthening transitions.

I think the concept of it is great. You know, it does provide opportunities for looked-after young people who we know are disadvantaged in multiple areas. (TM LA17)

The comment above resonated with sentiments across the data which recognized additional challenges facing young people leaving care. Participants perceived the basic income as a morally just intervention, with young people leaving care collectively positioned as deserving of increased financial support. One HoS (LA7) noted that the basic income pilot had the potential to ‘*free*’ young people from structural ‘*restraints*’ and facilitate new opportunities.

Related to perceptions of the basic income as freeing, participants shared examples of young people enjoying new experiences. One HoS (LA1) stated: ‘some of our kids have gone on holiday for the first time, how beautiful is that?’. Elaborating on the same topic, a PA discussed a young person who has:

... done a lot of travelling. He’s in college and on his college break and, to be honest, it was one of my favourite moments of the year. He’d gone to Madrid, and it was the first time he’d been on a plane, and the excitement of him showing me the pictures of the buildings he’d seen,

and the food he'd had, you know, that's something he wouldn't have been able to do without [the basic income]. (PA LA22)

This illustrates a tangible way in which young people's disadvantage was reduced by the basic income—through opening up travel and leisure opportunities previously unavailable to them. Participants valued the improved parity of experiences with young people of a similar age who are not care-experienced, but also perceived the new experiences as beneficial for wellbeing, future outlook, and social development.

Participants also discussed young people who were seen to be using the opportunity to bolster their futures. Primarily this related to engaging with education, training, or employment and/or using the money to boost their future opportunities:

I have got a few like I said, who are making it work for them, and they're saving, doing their driving lessons, saving for the car, saving for uni, continuing to work as well as being in education. (PA LA13)

Learning to drive and secure access to a car was a recurrent feature across the data and typically considered a means to boost employability. Likewise, participants appreciated young people's efforts to save money and make spending decisions based on future plans or needs. In this way, the basic income was seen to offer opportunities for prospective decision making, allowing young people to pursue interests and options for longer term gain. This was discussed by the following HoS:

... [young people are] looking back at education, and then they can re-train, and they're looking back into employment as well. But ... [they don't have to take/rely on] that zero-hour contract, which is absolutely brilliant, because that's such a noose for our young people. It's awful. (HoS LA7)

The comment above suggests that the basic income provided financial security, which enabled young people to avoid precarious employment resulting from underdeveloped skills and/or pressures to earn money. Instead, the basic income allowed young people to pursue their interests and talents, develop skills and experience, providing the foundation for more sustainable and secure employment.

Unsurprisingly, as these examples show, participants appreciate spending decisions which are likely to create future prosperity and opportunities, which often incorporate delayed rather than instant gratification. One PA (LA13) stated that such successful examples were, 'down to the individual and their discipline and their strength of character'.

This section has outlined professionals' favourable views of the basic income pilot. The policy was welcomed for its potential to meaningfully reduce disadvantage and increase opportunities for young people leaving care. Participants recognized the potentially life-changing nature of the

basic income but felt the way young people responded—how they chose to use the money—was crucial.

Differential impacts and the potential for harm

The provision of the basic income to young people with varied needs and in differing circumstances generated much discussion. For example, participants noted uncertainties and disproportionate impacts depending on young people's living arrangements and legal status. Due to its classification as an income, eligibility for state support in respect of housing and legal advice was restricted and this had financial implications for some young people.

With regards to accommodation, young people in temporary and supported housing were reported to be particularly impacted because of using sizeable proportions of the basic income on rent. One PA stated:

I am majorly disappointed in the amount of rent that [young people in supported housing] have to pay, because I thought this was supposed to improve their chances and give them their best opportunity to live an independent life ... I found it really hard to have those conversations to say, 'I know I said you'd get twelve hundred pounds, and you'd be better off, but actually, you now need to pay seven hundred and fifty pounds in accommodation costs'. (PA LA3)

Concern that young people were required to spend significant proportions of the basic income on rent payments was a recurrent concern for those in supported accommodation but also noted across other settings, such as the private sector. At this early stage of the pilot, participants in the focus groups expressed some uncertainty about basic income recipients' eligibility for non-means tested housing benefits. In contrast, young people in extended care provision and continuing to live with foster carers, were frequently cited as paying much lower sums. For context, administrative data capturing young people aged 16 and over, leaving care in Wales between 2022 and 2023, showed 25 percent entering extended care (When I Am Ready) placements and 28 percent entering some form of supported accommodation ([Welsh Government 2024](#)). Disparities in housing costs also affect young people not in receipt of basic income, but the practitioners here suggested that their initial expectation of a generous income for all recipients, did not transpire in practice as young people were left with varying sums after housing costs and other expenses. As evidenced in the comment above, the knock-on financial implications and high rent payments for some meant that the basic income represented a more limited opportunity than was initially anticipated.

Reduced access to state support and concerns for financial implications were also discussed in respect of legal advice and support (legal

aid) and the impact of this was even more uncertain than that of housing costs. Anticipating the need for legal aid, as well as estimating the amount and cost of legal support required, was reported to be challenging and hindered determinations as to whether young people would be better off in receipt of basic income. Former unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people were repeatedly highlighted as a group who, if they accepted the basic income, risked liability for legal costs. This was dependent on the outcome of their asylum applications either because receipt of payments during the pilot or any savings made with its support, including in the period after its conclusion, breached income or capital tests:

... if our young people who are unaccompanied asylum seekers claim basic income, they will not get any of their legal fees paid for, to gain their status into the country. Meaning, in years to come, they're going to have to pay up so much into their legal fees, and we're trying to work out which is best for them (PA LA12)

Despite the apparent simplicity of the basic income, these examples highlight a more complex reality. Participants were acutely aware that there may be differential and sometimes uncertain financial impacts for some young people.

In addition to financial considerations, participants were also concerned about the potential negative impact on some young people's health and well-being:

You know, this is a fantastic opportunity... I think the biggest concern... was about those young people that that were vulnerable, already at risk of exploitation, and that, you know, were misusing alcohol, and drugs. (HoS LA15)

The sentiments above were widely held by participants who expressed concerns about the basic income being given to vulnerable young people. The potentially damaging impact of the basic income for young people at risk of exploitation or misusing substances was repeatedly raised and viewed as potentially amplifying existing needs. With regards to addiction, one PA (LA21) commented: 'young people with substance misuse problems, that's going to be an issue because they have got more money to buy the substances'. Likewise, the basic income was seen as having the potential to initiate new risks and concerns, such as becoming targets for exploitation because they had more money. One TM (LA10) noted young people suddenly having 'a group of "friends" around them' whose motives they believed were to financially exploit, rather than befriend, the recipient.

Related to concerns about the impact on young people's health and well-being, participants also expressed unease about the temporary nature of the basic income and how young people would manage when

payments stopped, and they would be ‘used to significant sums of money’ (HoS LA15). Likewise, a PA stated:

When it all finishes, everybody has got to try and re-adjust and I think this group of young people in particular do find things hard to adjust. Not all of them, but some of them, because of the past experiences they’ve had.... You know, how do you go from receiving, from like a [living] wage payment to going back onto actual benefits, which is a big, big drop? And I think that’s when things are going to come crashing down for some young people. (PA LA21)

In addition to concerns about the temporary nature of the basic income and the potential for detrimental implications in respect of health and well-being, participants expressed anxiety about some young people’s ability to budget and manage the money. Related to previous discussions of vulnerabilities, one PA questioned the capacity of some young people to make strategic decisions:

Within that cohort, you’ve got this group of young people, they don’t have a diagnosis, but there is sort of delayed learning... that don’t really comprehend what they’re getting, or what they should do with it, and they’re always a worry. (PA LA4)

In this way, participants have little expectation of progress during the pilot, nor sustained benefits post-pilot, for some of the young people they work with. Similarly, concerns were also apparent for young people perceived to be choosing to disengage from education, training, and employment:

...[Young people are] basically getting a wage to do nothing, where’s the motivation to work, where’s the motivation to find jobs, and where are they going to be in two years’ time now? Their CVs are going to have a two-year career gap ... and what are they going to do, they’re just going to end up just continuing on [benefits]. (PA LA12)

As they were positive about the prospects of young people who they felt spent the money wisely, participants expressed concern about those who they perceived as doing the opposite—spending the money on short term needs or wants. As detailed in the comments, specific concerns were raised in relation to routine, addictions, and eschewing education or work. And for some young people their limited capacity—through learning difficulties or addictions—also made them feel pessimistic about the longer-term outlook. This was particularly notable when they discussed the exit from the pilot. In contrast to perceptions of young people capitalizing on the opportunity of the basic income, the comments suggested that this will not be possible or forthcoming from all, and as such, the basic income will offer temporary rather than long-term benefit.

This section provided insight into the reasons for mixed views on the basic income pilot. While the needs, circumstances and characteristics of

some young people were seen as facilitators of future success, this same set of factors conspired to pose on-going barriers and heightened disadvantage for others.

Discussion

The early reflections of professionals with experience of delivering the basic income pilot offer valuable insights into the ambitious but controversial scheme. Mixed and conflicted views were repeatedly apparent; while many of the participants were excited by the promise of the pilot and the potential of a basic income to meaningfully counter disadvantage, such enthusiasm was undermined when considered across a diverse group of young people. This section will consider the mixed perspectives in relation to key policy and practice tensions, namely the corporate parenting responsibilities of participating professionals and the delivery of the pilot in the context of devolution.

As corporate parents, legislative guidance directs professionals to ‘act as any responsible and conscientious parents would act’ ([Welsh Government 2018](#): 100). Participants typically described established relationships with young people, with whom they were professionally and emotionally invested. Such relationships prompted participants to anticipate the likely impact of the basic income, and this induced feelings of optimism for some young people but concern for others. Whilst some of the comments may be interpreted as paternalistic and/or pessimistic, arguably downplaying young people’s resilience and potential, they can similarly be read as reflective of committed and responsible corporate parents. While participants were keen to promote the life chances of the young people they support, they were also eager to safeguard them from unintended or harmful consequences. Viewed in this way, participants were seeking to balance the rights and entitlements of young people with the professional responsibilities of corporate parenting.

Participants’ concern about differential impacts can also be related to the complexities of devolution. Ideological differences noted above characterize differences between policymaking in Wales and central government ([MacKinnon 2015](#)). The combination of partial powers and differing political priorities impeded participants’ understanding of how the basic income would affect individual young people’s specific circumstances. Their views conveyed both frustration and confusion in relation to the interaction of the basic income pilot with non-devolved state supports. Most notably, this played out in confusions around levels of housing benefit and access to legal aid.

Related to this, the mixed views mirror policy debates regarding universal or targeted interventions, and the provision of condition or unconditional support ([Martinelli 2017](#)). These policy tensions could be seen

to be playing out in the focus group discussions. Recognition of the disadvantaged position of all care leavers lends itself to a universal approach, whereas anticipation of positive outcomes for only some young people, leans towards a targeted approach. Likewise, whilst the absence of conditions was understood as freeing and motivating for some, a more controlled and obligated approach was perceived as necessary for others. In this way, participants show simultaneous concern to counter social injustice as well as spending public money responsibly. Considered against the policy intent of the basic income pilot to ‘invest’ in young people, allow them to ‘thrive’ and ‘build a future life’ ([Welsh Government 2022a, 2022b](#): n.p.), participants’ perspectives are shaped by the extent to which they perceive such aims as feasible for individual young people.

Conclusion

The findings contribute to the wider evaluation, developments of further basic income pilots and on-going efforts to strengthen support for young people leaving care. For the current study, the findings further an understanding of factors influencing professional support and criticism of the pilot. The findings inform theoretical developments about if, how and for whom the pilot may have the intended effects. The potential for unintended negative effects reminds us that interventions can sometimes be harmful for some participants, and that these should be understood ([Allen-Scott, Hatfield, and McIntyre 2014](#)).

Basic income trials have grown multi-fold in recent years ([Stanford Basic Income Lab 2024](#)) but empirical gaps remain in relation to different contexts and populations ([Castro and West 2022](#)). This article highlights considerations regarding the implementation of basic income schemes within different jurisdictions and the targeting of marginalized and/or vulnerable populations. It also speaks to key concerns regarding policy lessons from basic income piloting. First, there are concerns that the effects of a basic income will differ based on policy specifications ([Aerts, Marx, and Verbist 2025](#)) and on the circumstances of different recipients ([Gibson, Hearty, and Craig 2018](#)). Further, while many Universal Basic Income advocates claim that it can minimize bureaucratic influence, our findings highlight the continued importance of bureaucratic support structures, along with a basic income ([De Wispelaere and Morales 2016](#)).

Finally, the findings emphasize the importance of considering diversity amongst young people leaving care. As suggested by [van Breda et al. \(2023\)](#) research has tended to focus on a homogenous group of young people, with insufficient attention to individual needs, characteristics and circumstances. As evidenced in the findings of this article, for both

researchers and policy makers, acknowledging such diversity are paramount in understanding the broad scope of transition experiences and outcomes.

Nevertheless, these findings have limitations. Data collection occurred during the early stages of the pilot and the perceptions and views of professionals may change. The political landscape has already changed with the election of a Labour Westminster Government and, over time, more will become known about the outcomes and trajectories of young people in receipt of the basic income. Related to this, it is important to note that professional perceptions of young people's needs, vulnerabilities, and anticipated trajectories may be inconsistent with those of young people. As noted by Mannay (2023) care-experienced young people can reject ascribed labels of vulnerability and the views and experiences of recipients, to be reported in future papers, will be a vital source of evidence.

Finally, the findings of this article arguably downplay the role and influence of professionals. As has been noted in other studies, practitioners influence and humanize the delivery and receipt of policy intervention (May and Winter 2009). While practitioners may not represent typical street level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1971) as they do not control eligibility or issue funds for the basic income, they nevertheless are responsible for providing holistic support and assistance to young people as they leave care. As noted by Bečević and Höjer (2025: 12) 'Material conditions and [our emphasis] supportive relationships during the transition process shape early adulthood and set the framework for future aspirations'. As such, professionals are likely active rather than passive in young people's transitions with the potential to shape their experiences and outcomes. Subsequent parts of the evaluation will explore the potential of professionals as 'shapers' and if and in what ways views of the pilot are played out in interactions with young people.

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