6 Work, poverty and welfare

**6.1 WEALTH AND INCOME**

P.384/5 GETTING YOU THINKING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** This would mean that the sums quoted in the table are likely to under-estimate the actual wealth of those listed.

**2.** Nom-doms benefit from being able to enjoy the benefits of living in the UK whilst not having to pay taxes that would be due if they were citizens of the UK.

**3.** Such extreme wealth inequalities are likely to have a number of possible effects:

* They could lead to people questioning the legitimacy of the system (for example, the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations in New York in 2011 under the slogan ‘*we are the 99%’.*
* They may have an impact on the economy if it means that there is insufficient aggregate demand because only the rich can afford to consume
* They are likely to be associated with increasing economic insecurity amongst those towards the bottom of society since they lack a cushion should they lose their jobs or become ill.

**4.** There is no right or wrong answer here. The question is intended to provoke discussion about the values of UK society.

P.391 Focus on research: *THE SPIRIT LEVEL*

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Reliability has to do with getting consistent results. This means to ensure that if someone else carried out the same research, they would obtain the same results. One way in which Wilkinson and Pickett did this was by using the same data sources for all the countries and USA states they examined.

**2.** Usually, when people argue about inequality they use arguments about what is morally right or wrong to support their case e.g. that a society with high levels of economic inequality would be ‘unfair’. What is novel about *The Spirit Level* is that it provides statistical evidence that less equal societies have higher levels of health and social problems. It also suggests that *all* sections of society would benefit from greater equality, not just those towards the bottom of the stratification system.

**3.** The country with the lowest level of health and social problems is Japan; the highest is the USA, in terms of Wilkinson and Pickett’s index of health and social problems.

**4.** The UK comes out third worst after the USA and Portugal in terms of the index of health and social problems. The UK is also the third most unequal country.

**5.** This research is politically sensitive because it suggests that to reduce the severity of health and social problems in a society, governments need to tackle levels of economic inequality. Right-wing political parties tend to downplay the importance of inequality as a source of health and social problems.

p.392 FOCUS ON SKILLS: trickle-down Economics

**Suggested answers**

**1.** ‘Trickle-down economics’ refers to an influential theory within economics which suggests that if an economy is organised so as to favour entrepreneurs (low rates of personal and corporate tax, low levels of government regulation of industry, etc.) the wealth thereby created will eventually benefit everyone.

**2.** UK governments since the Eighties have largely accepted this theory (New Labour slightly less enthusiastically than the preceding Conservative governments and succeeding Coalition government) with the result that economic and fiscal (i.e. to do with taxation and government spending) policies have been designed to reduce income tax and corporation tax, limit the rights of trades unions, liberalise regulations on business and reduce the ‘welfare burden’.

**3.** Shaheen is suggesting that this theory had become widely accepted as self-evidently true, rather than being recognised as open to question. This reflects the fact that neoliberal ideas have become hegemonic within society.

**4.** Shaheen identifies 3 main criticisms:

* The evidence relating to wealth and income indicates increasing concentration at the top rather than all sharing equally in economic growth
* Neither employment nor investment are correlated with lower top income tax rates
* Consumer demand is dependent on the income of the middle classes rather than the rich

**5.** The pursuit of trickle-down economic policies by successive governments has been associated with growing income inequality. Between 1998/9 and 2008/9 the poorest 10 per cent of the population experienced a 12 per cent decline in their real income (after housing costs), whilst the richest 10 per cent experienced a 38 per cent increase.

p393. Check your understanding

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Wealth can be seen as a stock of money, income as a regular or irregular flow of money.

**2.** Because it is easier for people to hide their wealth than their income. There is no 'wealth tax' as such in the UK, although when wealth changes hands it may be subject to taxation, e.g. inheritance tax. Consequently, wealth has to be estimated using indirect measures such as inheritance tax returns. Conversely, people are required to declare their annual income to HMRC.

**3.** The distribution of wealth in the UK became more even between 1950 and 1980, stabilised between 1980 and 2000 and has become more unequal since. Income inequalities declined steeply from the Second World War to 1980, but then increased rapidly up to 1990. Since then, there has been a more gradual upwards trend of growing income inequality, peaking in 2007/8.

**4.** Income

**5.** 158 years

**6.** Most governments in the western world have pursued 'austerity policies' since the 2007/8 financial crash in order to try to reduce their deficits (i.e. the difference between their annual income from taxation and expenditure). They have done this mainly by seeking to reduce their expenditure on welfare benefits and services and other public expenditure rather than by increasing taxation.

**7.**  UK uncut and the global Occupy movement.

**8.** Corporate captureis the claim that governments in many rich countries are unduly influenced by large, private companies through such mechanisms as behind the scenes lobbying, the direct funding of political parties, the funding of pro-business think tanks and 'revolving doors' (i.e. the movement of key personnel from government departments into the corporate sector and vice versa).

**9.** There are many examples of behind the scenes lobbying by commercial interests to limit government regulation of business. For example, since 2013, government departments have been subject to a rule of 'one-in, two-out regulation': they cannot introduce new rules which will cost business money - for instance, caps on vehicle emissions - unless they scrap existing ones worth at least twice that cost. Another example is provided by what happened to the Coalition Government’s alcohol strategy of March 2012 which included a commitment to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol. A consultation on the strategy recommended a price of 45p per unit. In July 2013, following its analysis of the consultation’s responses, the Coalition said that it would not be proceeding with a minimum unit price, claiming there was not enough “concrete evidence” that this would be effective in reducing the harms associated with problem drinking without penalising responsible drinkers. There would instead be a ban on the sale of alcohol below cost price. This came into force on 28 May 2014 and is one of the licensing conditions of the mandatory code of practice that applies to licensed premises. Critics argue that it was pressure from the alcohol manufacturers lobby that led to the government's rejection of a minimum pricing policy.

**10.** Higher levels of homicide and obesity and lower levels of social mobility.

**6.2 Defining and measuring poverty**

P.398 Focus on skills: measuring poverty

**1.** Six indicators of poverty: they live in temporary accommodation, Jennie struggles to feed her children, Jennie regularly goes without food herself, they rarely socialise, they never have a holiday, and Jennie often runs out of money.

**2.** If one were to use an absolute definition of poverty, the fact that they have a roof over their heads, generally get by on food and have access to health services and education would suggest that Jennie and her family were not in poverty.

**3.** No prescribed answer.

**4.** Given that it would appear that Jennie acts as a full time carer for her 3 sons and would therefore be unable to take on paid employment, there is no obvious way in which Jennie and her family can improve their situation (other than finding a partner who could contribute to the household budget).

**5.** The basic reason is that the welfare state has ceased to provide an adequate safety net for certain categories of people in the UK.

**6.** It is perfectly possible to talk about poverty existing in the UK today provided one accepts that poverty can be defined in relative terms (i.e. in terms of the standard of living in a particular society at a particular time). However, ultimately, debates about poverty inevitably involve both factual and moral issues since peoples’ views of what do and do not qualify as ‘necessities’ entail value-judgements.

P.400 Focus on skills: what are the real necessities?

**1.** People’s ideas about ‘necessities’ change over time. The items and activities that have been judged by over 50 per cent of the sample to be necessities in all four surveys are: heating to keep home warm; damp-free home; two meals a day; washing machine; celebrations on special occasions; warm waterproof coat; two pairs of all-weather shoes; television.

**2.** The items and activities which best indicate that people’s ideas of necessities need to reflect contemporary styles of living are those which show either a significant growth or significant decline in the percentage choosing them, in particular: two meals a day, a telephone, a car and a roast joint or equivalent at least once a week.

**3.** Some sociologists might be critical of what they see as a lack of *precision* in the wording e.g. ‘fresh fruit and vegetables every day’: in what quantities? ‘celebrations on special occasions’: what counts as ‘special occasions’? ‘car’: could it be second-hand”? Others might be critical of the need for respondents to make implicit judgements e.g. ‘heating to keep home adequately warm’: what counts as ‘adequately’ warm? ‘appropriate clothes for interview’: what would count as ‘appropriate’?

**4.** Minimum budget standard approaches are based on estimates by experts of the amount of money needed to provide a minimum income for a healthy lifestyle. They do this by identifying a basket of essential goods and costing those goods so as to set a minimum budget necessary to live healthily. They are essentially based on absolute notions of poverty.

Consensual approaches use public opinion to set minimum standards by asking a representative sample of the public to identify what they consider to be necessities. Using those items and activities which at least 51 per cent consider to be necessities, they then identify a poverty threshold by relating to income those who lack necessities because they can’t afford them (rather than from choice). They thus define poverty in terms of both multiple deprivation and income. Consensual approaches are based on relative notions of poverty.

Minimum budget standard approaches take a fairly limited view of what people need to avoid being poor and therefore exclude a range of items and activities that many people would see as necessities. As such, one could legitimately argue that consensual approaches are better able to reveal the real degree of deprivation in society - although the term ‘real’ is not as clear-cut as it sounds since it begs the question of *what counts as* ‘real deprivation’ and this is open to debate!

P.403 Check your understanding

**1.** Three former ‘luxuries’ that have arguably become ‘necessities’ in the last 20 years are central heating, mobile phones and home computers.

**2.** Rowntree distinguished between **primary poverty:** where household income was so low that however carefully people budgeted they would be unable to achieve a healthy standard of living, and **secondary poverty:** where household income would, in principle, be sufficient to provide a healthy standard of living, but this was not achieved because some of their income was ‘misspent’.

**3.** To subsist is to do little more than survive from one day to the next. So subsistence poverty refers to a situation where people live a precarious existence in which their ability to obtain the necessities of life is never certain.

**4.** Relative poverty refers to the situation where people are unable to enjoy the standards of living that are customary or widely expected in a particular society at a particular time.

**5.** Social exclusion refers to the situation of those living outside or on the margins of society who experience multiple forms of material and social deprivation e.g. inadequate income, substandard housing, high risk of being victims of crime, soulless surroundings, unemployment, etc**.**

**6.** Relative poverty has come to be accepted as a ‘better’ way of measuring poverty than the minimum budget standards approach by most – though not all – sociologists and politicians because it reflects the fact that, as standards of living improve, so people’s ideas about what are ‘luxuries’ and what are ‘necessities’ change.

**7.** The main reason subsistence poverty does not exist in Britain today is because of the existence of the welfare state, supplemented by charities. However, if people slip through the welfare safety net (e.g. those living on the streets) they are at risk of subsistence poverty.

**8.** Booth used what was essentially a minimum budget standard – 18 to 21 shillings a week for a moderate family – to distinguish the poor from the non-poor.

**9.** The principal innovation of Mack and Lansley’s approach was to make use of opinion polling to establish what a representative sample of the adult population saw as necessities at a particular point in time and then use those items and activities to calculate the numbers living in poverty. The main strengths of this approach were that it could be seen as ‘democratic’ and given that it reflected public rather than ‘expert’ opinion, legitimate.

**10.** Both of these ways of thinking about deprivation and inequality are sociologically useful. Measures of poverty tell us how many people in a society, or more widely, are living below a certain standard of living and either struggling to survive (absolute poverty) or struggling to experience a standard of living which most people in a particular society take for granted (relative poverty).

Social exclusion is a closely related concept in which poverty is likely to figure prominently, but which goes beyond poverty per se to examine the various factors that can lead to people living on the margins of society, both literally and metaphorically. Literally, in that they are often located in peripheral housing estates or run-down inner-city ‘ghettos’. Metaphorically, in that the socially excluded often have little engagement with the wider cultural and social institutions of society.

It could therefore be argued that social exclusion is a ‘better’ measure of deprivation and inequality because it is broader in focus, but some would argue that, ultimately, many if not most of the problems associated with social exclusion come down to poverty and that the concept of social exclusion diverts attention from the crucial role played by a lack of money.

**6.3 The extent of poverty**

P.408 Focus on skills: who are the poor?

**1.** The group which makes up the largest proportion of the poor in the table is those in full time employment who are low-paid.

**2.** Likely reasons for being in poverty:

* In full-time work: lacking wealth and on low pay
* In part-time work: lacking wealth and on low pay or needing to work longer hours
* Unemployed: lacking wealth and either not receiving all the benefits they are entitled to or subject to benefit sanctions or benefits are inadequate
* Permanently sick/disabled: lacking wealth and unable to work
* Looking after family/home: lacking wealth and unable to work
* Retired: lacking wealth with inadequate pension provision and unable/unwilling to work
* Student: lacking wealth and unable/unwilling to combine study with employment

**3.** Although it depends to some extent on the measure of poverty used, it is true to say that there have been some changes in the likelihood of poverty for different groups. In particular, the proportion of old people and children in poverty has fallen over the last 30 years, and the proportion of adults in work, and of working age adults without children, who are poor has increased.

There is not the space to examine each of these in detail, but we will look at one of them as an example of how government policy can make a difference. In recent years some government policies have benefited the elderly. In 2010, the newly elected Coalition government introduced what it called a 'triple lock' on the state pension which guaranteed that it would rise every year by whichever was the highest: price inflation, earnings or 2.5 per cent. (The Conservative government elected in 2015 has pledged to continue with the triple lock.) In 2011, compulsory retirement was outlawed, allowing people to continue working after 65 should they so wish. The employment rate for people aged 65 and over increased from 5 per cent in 2001 to nearly 10 per cent in 2013. As a result the proportion of the elderly living in poverty in the UK has been falling in recent years, from 2.2m in 2005/6 to 1.8m in 2011.

P.412 Focus on research: Shildrick and MacDonald (2015)

**1.** The research method used by Shildrick and MacDonald was in-depth interviews with a sample of White, working class men and women in Middlesbrough who had experience of the changing local labour market.

The strengths of in-depth interviews are that they allow interviewees to tell their own stories with minimal direction from the interviewers, thereby increasing *validity*, and – provided the sample was representative – to generalise from their findings to the wider survey population.

The weaknesses are that in-depth interviews are not as *reliable* as structured interviews and interview research carries the risk of *interviewer effect* where the answers given vary to some degree according to the characteristics of the interviewer.

**2.** Teesside has been hit badly by de-industrialisation and the interviewees had experienced the effects of this in terms of employment and unemployment. Some were in deep poverty and struggled to feed or clothe themselves properly or furnish and heat their homes adequately. They nevertheless generally rejected the label of ‘poor’ as a self-designation, identifying poverty with individual ineptitude or moral failure. The poor were the ‘other’, reflecting the stigma associated with poverty, unsurprising given the political attacks on ‘scroungers’ and ‘skivers’ mounted by neoliberal politicians and newspapers in recent years.

**3.** The groups in poverty are quite diverse, but there is good evidence that the experience of living in poverty means that poor people share many commonalities. For example, constant shortage of funds, a necessary focus on the day-to-day exigencies of life, debt, health problems – both physical and mental – and the challenge to one’s self-esteem of being unable to take part in activities considered normal within the wider society, not to mention the social stigma associated with poverty.

P.413 Check your understanding

**1.** Disabled people are less likely to be in employment; because of their lack of qualifications, if they are able to work they may have to make do with low-paid employment, and they are likely to have higher outgoings.

**2.** Fuel poverty is a particular problem for some elderly people because they may lack funds and because fuel bills in the UK are high (although all old people who are UK residents - and some who aren’t - are entitled to a Winter Fuel Payment).

**3.** The ‘feminisation’ of poverty refers to social changes over recent decades that have led to poverty - particularly severe poverty - becoming more associated with women than men.

**4.** The ‘precariat’ are the part of the workforce that tends to have a succession of low-paid temporary jobs offering little security. Guy Standing sees them as an emerging, new social class.

**5.** The ‘jinxed generation’ is the name given by Lansley and Mack (2015) to those born around 1990 because they are the first generation in a long time to see their incomes stagnate.

**6.** A (social) stigma is something which is seen as socially discrediting. It is perhaps unavoidable in a materialistic society which values individualism and self-sufficiency, that poverty will be seen as shameful.

Declan Gaffney, writing in the New Statesman (15/02/2013) argues that “stigma is the external, social counterpart to internal feelings of shame, worthlessness and moral inferiority. Shame is what individuals feel: stigma is the imposition by others of a shameful identity. And to be poor has, almost throughout human history, entailed a particular vulnerability to the imposition of shameful identities. Indeed Amartya Sen has argued that shame is at the “irreducible absolutist core” of the idea of poverty”.

Yet, in recent years, neoliberal policies and their rhetorical justification by politicians have arguably exacerbated the link between poverty and stigma by associating poverty in the public mind with the work-shy, benefit scroungers and people who waste their money on drugs and alcohol. Shildrick and MacDonald’s recent research (2015) finding that poor people are reluctant to self-identify as poor is, arguably, indicative of this.

**7.** The growth of in-work poverty is mainly a consequence of two developments. Firstly, the stagnation of wage rates over the last decade or so: between 2009 and 2015 the average UK worker experienced a 9 per cent decline in their real income – that is, allowing for inflation (Inequality Briefing, 2015). Secondly, the growth of various forms of precarious employment associated with zero-hours contracts, agency work, short-term contracts and casualisation.

**8.** Poverty rates are higher among British African Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani households than White households for a number of reasons: higher rates of educational underachievement, higher rates of unemployment and concentration in low-paying employment sectors. Racial discrimination also plays a part: in 2004, a BBC survey showed ethnic-minority applicants still face major discrimination in the job market.

**9.** Inter-generational poverty occurs because growing up in poverty has various negative consequences for children which reduce their chances of being upwardly socially mobile. For example, it may lead to health problems which impact on their schooling or to stress which makes it difficult to concentrate at school or to low self-esteem which reduces their confidence in tackling school work. They are also likely to lack cultural and social capital. As a result, they lack educational qualifications and find themselves limited to low-paying and insecure work and/or dependence on social security benefits. This vicious circle is known as the cycle of poverty.

**10.** There are diverse groups that face a higher risk than others of being in poverty: single-parent families, long-term sick and disabled people, certain ethnic-minority groups, homeless people, and so on. However, some sociologists argue that this diversity masks the fact that they also have something in common, namely a social location at the bottom of the class structure. The following chapter is concerned with exploring how poverty can be explained.

**6.4 EXPLAINING THE EXISTENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF POVERTY**

p.419 Focus on research; poverty first hand

**1.** Interviews

**2.** It is representative in that the people who were interviewed came from ‘a wide variety of local groups across the country’ composed of those on low incomes. However, the sample was relatively small because it only comprised 137 people.

**3.** The way that society was organised rather than individual failings.

**4.** On the one hand, the data could be described as very valid because the sample had direct daily experience of poverty. The interviews were probably unstructured and consequently they seem to have uncovered a lot of qualitative information about what it feels like to be poor, that is, people reported that they felt demoralised and stigmatised. The respondents probably felt they could trust the interviewers because they have communicated very personal feelings. On the other hand, positivist sociologists might criticise this research because of its use of unstructured interviews. These tend to be very individual, dependent upon the very personal relationship and trust established between the interviewer and interviewee and therefore difficult to exactly repeat across 137 people. In other words, they are not regarded as reliable compared with structured interviews or questionnaires. There is also the possibility of a social desirability effect in that the interviewees might have furnished the interviewers with the information they were hoping to hear in order to obtain their approval. This qualitative data may contain exaggerations and distortions as a result and consequently lack validity. There is also no way of checking whether those who took part in the research are ‘typical’ of the poor.

**5.** People in poverty may not be able to provide an adequate explanation of poverty because (a) they may be reluctant to blame their situation on personal failings or inadequacy and (b) they be not be fully aware of the social processes emanating from the social organisation of capitalism such as globalisation that might be responsible for the degree of poverty in their locality, and (c) there exist a diverse range of reasons for poverty depending on people’s specific characteristics and experiences, for example, the reasons why elderly people are in poverty may be quite different to the reasons why ethnic minority groups experience poverty.

p.421 Focus on skills: ‘Comment’ by Polly Toynbee

**1.** Toynbee implies that the Conservative Party favours dependency-based explanations of poverty especially the idea that poverty is caused by ‘fecklessness’ and welfare dependency. Elements of the underclass theory can be seen in the notion that the poor are over breeding, producing problem children that they cannot afford whilst living immoral lifestyles.

**2.** Pember-Reeves (1913) suggests that the poor lack certain skills such as how to cook whilst Sir Keith Joseph suggested that mothers lacking in intelligence and education were having too many children and were unable exert control over them. These ideas have been resurrected by the likes of Iain Duncan-Smith.

**3.** The Guardian is a left-leaning newspaper and its views on poverty probably reflect social democratic and feminist ideas. The Daily Mail is a right-leaning newspaper which is usually supportive of the Conservative Government. Consequently it is likely to sympathise with New Right explanations of poverty that blame the lifestyle of the poor.

**4.** This question is asking for the student’s own opinion although this should be supported with evidence taken from Chapters 6.1-6.6.

P.422 Check your understanding

**1.** The hidden economy (also known as the shadow economy) refers to economic activity that goes unregulated by HMRC. It usually involves jobs done for cash which is not declared in order to avoid tax.

**2.** Individualistic theories of poverty tend to blame the poor for poverty. It is suggested that some people are idle and refuse to look for jobs, that they are happy to live off welfare benefits and that their lifestyle choices are wasteful.

**3.** First, one of the groups most likely to be in poverty is the low-paid. These people are not idle or feckless. They often have more than one job. Secondly, some sociologists see poverty as caused by the fact that wealth is concentrated in so few hands.

**4.** Dependency-based explanations argue that the poor are in some way the cause of their own poverty whilst exclusion-based explanations blame the way that the economic and political systems are organised.

**5.** There is no convincing evidence of an underclass subculture complete with a work-shy, feckless and dependent value system. The evidence suggests that the majority of the poor have values similar to the rest of society, that is, they want jobs and a secure standard of living. Secondly, the long-term unemployed only make up a small fraction of people in poverty and those claiming benefits. Most people claiming benefits are either pensioners or those already in some type of work.

**6.** An advantage of the feminist theory of poverty is that it has highlighted the unequal distribution of caring roles between men and women and shown how women’s unpaid responsibility for the caring of the sick, the disabled, the elderly and children has contributed to the increasing number of women found in poverty. However, feminist theories tend to over-focus on gender at the expense of other important variables such as social class, age and ethnicity.

**7.** The Marxist explanation blames the organisation of capitalism and claims that poverty will always exist so long as capitalism persists. In contrast, the social democratic approach prefers to reform capitalist society rather than to totally replace it. They are critical of neo-liberal social policies focused on austerity which they claim have worsened poverty. They believe in policies which focus on retraining the poor, attracting new investment into deprived areas and protecting the rights of workers so that their labour cannot be exploited in terms of low pay and zero hour contracts.

**8.** Marxists fail to explain why some groups are more likely to experience poverty than others. They see the State as acting exclusively in the interests of the rich and powerful, but if this is the case how did the welfare state come into being?

**9.** Marxists criticise the social democratic approach to poverty because social democratic policies only treat the symptoms of poverty rather than their cause which Marxists argue is the capitalist system. The New Right criticise social democratic policies because they see them as over-interfering in the lives of individuals and as responsible for creating a welfare-dependent underclass as well as a ‘nanny state’.

**10.** Interference implies that there may be a negative outcome, for example, dependency on benefits and a nanny state whilst intervention implies a positive outcome, for example, a reduction in poverty.

**6.5 WELFARE**

P.428 FOCUS ON RESEARCH: WELFARE reforms fail to move tenants into work

**Suggested answers**

**1.** To examine the impact of the Coalition government's welfare reforms on the employment of social housing tenants.

**2.** The research was able to produce quantitative data by calculating percentages from the responses of their sample e.g. the percentage that had found work or increased their hours in 2013/14. Qualitative data was produced by allowing interviewees to talk about their experiences in relation to finding work.

**3.** One advantage is that interviewers are able to establish rapport with interviewees and thereby encourage them to be honest. One disadvantage is that interviewees may be unintentionally influenced by the appearance and demeanour of the interviewers.

**4.** Since the research was carried out in only the SW of England, it is possible that different results might have been obtained in other regions of the country. The accusation that it was insufficiently 'robust' is difficult to judge without any indication of the grounds on which this claim was based.

**5.**  The research suggests that the Coalition government's reforms had been less successful than they claimed.

FOCUS ON SKILLS: No ID, no checks... and vouchers for sob stories: The truth behind those shock food bank claims

**Suggested answers**

**1.** People can acquire food vouchers from CAB by lying to them about their employment status; people are allowed to exceed the number of visits specified in food bank rules; people may be given food even if they don’t have a voucher if they have documentation from one of the organisations to whom vouchers are issued.

**2.** The right wing press has mounted campaigns against what it labels ‘bogus asylum seekers’ which has had the effect of stigmatising all asylum seekers, ‘bogus’ or not. By identifying some of the visitors to food banks as asylum seekers, the expectation would be that readers would perceive them as undeserving.

**3.** Neoliberals are in favour of charities providing welfare, but they would be likely to be disturbed by evidence that some people were ‘abusing’ food banks. Social democrats are likely to view this report as a thinly veiled attempt to cast doubt on the need for food banks by highlighting what they would see as minor issues. They would also be likely to interpret the evidence differently, e.g. the fact that staff from a supermarket whose customers were encouraged to donate food themselves used food banks could be seen as evidence of the low pay received by such workers. Most importantly, social democrats would see the very existence of food banks as evidence of the failure of the state to ensure an adequate minimum standard of living for its citizens.

**4.** At most, the article identifies a few cases where some people could be misusing food banks. These are then magnified into a ‘shock-horror’ story seeking to cast food banks in a negative light. The article ignores many other facts about food banks that could be identified – for example, the fact that thousands of people living in the sixth most prosperous country in the world have to rely on charity to feed themselves. The claim that it provides ‘the truth’ is therefore, at the very least, misleading.

p.434 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Cash payments by the state to working-age people who are out of work; cash payments by the state to anyone in need (a.k.a social security or social protection); social security plus the whole range of welfare *services* provided by the state, including health, housing and education; all welfare provision whoever provides it.

**2.** State, commercial, voluntary and informal.

**3.** Traditionally, socialists believe that the state should organise and control the economy and ensure that there are low levels of economic inequality in society. By contrast, social democrats see an important role for commercial enterprises and therefore favour a mixed economy (of privately owned and publicly owned enterprises) and believe that the state has an important role to play in mitigating the inequalities and social problems generated by unregulated capitalism.

**4.** The 5 evils were: ignorance, idleness, squalor, want and disease.

**5.** Council house tenants were granted the 'right to buy' their rented properties and responsibility for 'social housing' was largely transferred to third sector housing associations; social security benefits were increasingly means-tested; residential care was increasingly transferred from local authorities to private and voluntary providers; an 'internal-market' was introduced into the NHS which allowed GP practices to purchase patients’ healthcare from private providers.

**6.** 'Welfare to work' policies as in their 'New Deal' which required people on jobseekers allowance to accept offers of work experience, voluntary experience, education or training or face benefits sanctions; changes designed to tackle the problem of 'working poverty' (being employed but still in poverty) such as the introduction of a statutory minimum wage and Working Families Tax Credit (now divided into Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit) to boost low wages; an increased role for the private sector within the NHS in England, covering both primary and secondary care; public/private partnerships e.g. the Private Finance Initiative in which the private sector built hospitals and schools which it then rented to the NHS/local authorities respectively; policies designed to tackle social exclusion, such as Sure Start centres offering support to parents of pre-school children in deprived areas; the introduction of an 'academy' programme in secondary schools in England and Wales removing schools from local authority control.

**7.** The NHS in England was reorganised with local *Clinical Commissioning Groups* having the responsibility to commission (buy) healthcare services from *any qualified provider* in the state, private or voluntary sector. This has resulted in a further increase in the role of private sector companies within the NHS.

In education, New Labour's academy programme has been significantly expanded to include primary schools and 'free schools': state-funded schools which can be set up by businesses, voluntary organisations or parents.

Financial penalties relating to Housing Benefit were introduced in 2013 for working-age tenants of social housing for 'under-occupancy' (the so-called *Bedroom Tax*).

Many reforms have been made to the social security system including a benefits cap, harsher sanctions and the introduction of Work Capability Assessments for those moving from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance. However, the major reform has been the introduction of Universal Credit to replace six existing benefits for unemployed working-age people or those on a low income. It is designed to simplify the benefits system and tackle the unemployment and poverty trap.

**8.** Neoliberals argue that the welfare state indirectly increases poverty by hindering economic growth as the high levels of tax needed to fund the welfare state (allegedly) discourage entrepreneurial effort. They argue that it directly increases poverty by undermining people's willingness to look after themselves through employment.

**9.** Critics claim that poverty would increase if the welfare state were abolished. Tax credits and the minimum wage help to protect workers from exploitative employers. If there were no welfare state, society would be split between a wealthy minority and a mass of the poor who would have little stake in society. The fact that critics can point to failings in state provision of welfare does not mean that alternatives would necessarily be better. There is plenty of evidence of failings where the private sector has taken over provision. The fact that various social ills have appeared in society at the same time as the growth of the welfare state, does not mean that the latter has necessarily caused the former. This is to confuse correlation with causation.

**10.** The 2010 Conservative Party Manifesto described the Big Society as: "a society with much higher levels of personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility; a society where people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities; a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control."

**6.6 WORK**

P.443 FOCUS ON RESEARCH: gENERATIONS OF WORKLESSNESS

**Suggested answers**

**1.** The researchers meant that they had deliberately chosen to examine two areas where, if generations of worklessness exist in the UK, they would be found here. If they could not be found in Parkhill and East Kelby, then it was unlikely they would exist anywhere in the UK. John Goldthorpe and colleagues’ examination of the embourgeoisement thesis in the 1960s chose to focus their research on the Vauxhall car factory in Luton for the same reason: that if embourgeoisement was not taking place amongst highly paid, skilled workers living in a New Town in the south of England then it was unlikely to be occurring.

**2.** The researchers were unable to locate any families where there had been three generations of worklessness and found that the majority of residents in both areas were employed.

**3.** The researchers argue that the idea that ‘benefit ghettos’ exist is a myth and that the problem of high levels of unemployment in areas which have been de-industrialised is a consequence of structural unemployment: the lack of jobs in these areas.

**4.** One of the main strengths of this study is its use of empirical research to test a politically significant claim. Another is its use of a method – a critical case study – to provide a test of the claim that was both economical in financial terms and manageable in practical terms. A third strength was that by using face-to-face interviews the researchers were able to gather detailed qualitative data from their interviewees.

One possible limitation, common to all interview research, is that interviewees may not be completely honest. Another is that the researchers can’t be sure that different findings may have been gathered had they chosen other communities to investigate.

P.445 FOCUS ON SKILLS: mAID IN lONDOn 6.6

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Maid of London is employed, not by the hotel she cleans, but by an agency that provides cleaners to the hotel. Her contract guarantees a minimum of four hours work per week on minimum wage.

**2.** She is expected to fully clean and prepare for new guests, sixteen bedrooms in a 7.5 hour day, with a thirty minute unpaid lunch break.

**3.** The chambermaids are all female and belong to ethnic-minority groups, whilst the supervisors are male. Whilst we cannot be sure that the same characteristics would be found outside London or in other service occupations, it suggests that these two social categories may be particularly vulnerable to precarious employment conditions.

**4.** This means that blogs provide data produced by someone other than the researcher which shed light on some aspect of social life.

**5.** Blogs such as this provide a rich and unmediated insight into aspects of social life which it may be difficult to gain permission to research formally. The data provided is similar to that which could be gained through participant observation.

One limitation is that one cannot be sure that such blogs are not fiction masquerading as fact, or that the blogger is being honest – although commentators with relevant experience are likely to expose fantasists. Another limitation may be that what the blogger chooses to write about may not be in line with what the researcher is interested in. Thirdly, the account provided by the blogger will inevitably reflect their values and frame of reference. Such subjectivity would be seen as a strength by some sociologists, but as a problem by others.

p.446 CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING 6.6

**Suggested answers**

**1.** Paid employment is just one form that work can take. Voluntary work and domestic labour are forms of unpaid work.

**2.** The shadow economy can be divided into the grey economy, which involves legitimate work that is not declared to the tax authorities, and the black economy which involves activities that are illegal.

**3.** A post-industrial society is one in which extractive industries (e.g. mining) and manufacturing provide only a minor proportion of employment.

**4.** Anomie is linked to functionalist perspectives in sociology and refers to a situation where social norms are unclear, conflicting or unintegrated. Alienation is linked with Marxist perspectives and refers to a situation where people feel disconnected from their work, other people or society at large.

**5.** Technological determinism refers to the idea that technology completely shapes the organisation of production, allowing no scope for variation.

**6.** Fordist production techniques involve breaking down production into repetitive tasks that require little skill - and therefore, little training to master. Assembly line production is the ideal type. Post-Fordist production techniques involve higher levels of skill and greater labour flexibility.

**7.** In an industrial society, people's identity is constructed around their role in production and social classes are seen as fundamental features of the social structure. In a consumer society, people see themselves primarily as consumers and social classes are superseded by a multiplicity of different life styles (allegedly).

**8.** Reduced income; elevated rates of physical and mental health problems; loss of self-esteem; increased mortality rates; strained relationships within families; a decline in social engagement.

**9.** Efficiency, calculability, predictability and control.

**10.** People engaged in insecure employment, often - though not always - low paid and who are unable to plan in terms of traditional careers. Standing sees such people as forming an emerging and, what he calls a 'dangerous', class.